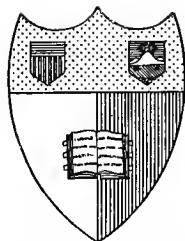


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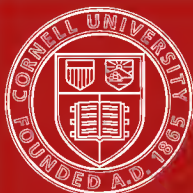
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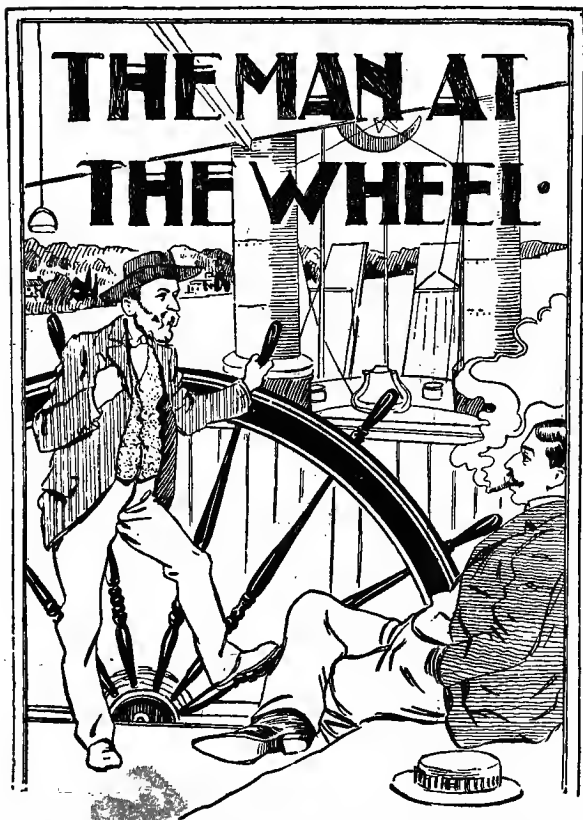
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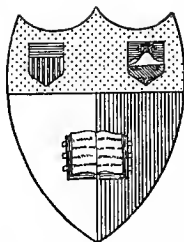
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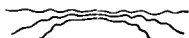
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TO ESTILL McHENRY WITH
PLEASANT MEMORIES OF
OLD NEWSPAPER DAYS
AND BRIGHT HOPES FOR
THE FUTURE WITH ALL
GRATEFUL AFFECTION OF
THE AUTHOR





“**I**N STORY, and in common parlance, the pioneer boatmen of the Mississippi occupied somewhat the position of the Bedouin Arabs of the East—though with a home three thousand miles long; and with a life which compelled them to combine the accomplishments of the sailor, the whaler, the backwoodsman and the Yankee, they were vastly superior to those mere mounted loafers of the desert. Probably no avocation in the world so taxed every kind of bodily dexterity, so disciplined the courage, so called upon the sharpness of the wits. Their constitutions were not only subjected to the changes of all climates, but their intercourse was with the inhabitants of all latitudes. They vibrated between the icicle and the sugar cane, familiarized on the way with every variety of produce, of soil, of merchandise and of character. They ate anything, toiled anyhow, slept anywhere. The particular neighborhood to which any of them were responsible for character—the spot in the wilderness where his chimney smoked and his wife waited for him—were trifles lost in the vastness of his range. His credit was the length of his visible purse; his reputation the length of his visible shadow. From the overlapping reciprocities and influences that constrained other men he was completely isolated. His strength was what he could show, what he could do, what he had got and what he was—for the moment. He depended wholly and habitually on himself.”



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THE OLD POST OFFICE



THE OLD POST OFFICE

1.

“ONE of the worst shooting scrapes that ever happened along the river,” began the man at the wheel, relaxing his hold on the tiller, which had been hard down, and permitting it to spin around with the velocity of a top, “took place out there, just above the mouth of the bayou, about thirty years ago, when they burned the old post office and the warehouse. You can see where they stood by the piles of bricks there on the bank.”

All admitted the ruins were plainly visible, when he changed to the opposite side of the wheel, and after a spirited effort, made to counteract the effects of an impinging current that had caused the boat to swerve from her course, he continued:

“The boat that I was on had got caught in the fog, and we tied up under the point there about five o’clock in the afternoon, and a lot of us went on shore to take a little exercise.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

It was on a Saturday, and a good many people had come in from the country to do their trading and get their mail. Some of them were pitching quoits and others shooting at a mark when we first landed, but they quit when they saw the man carry the mail bag we had brought, and went in and stood around waiting for the letters to be sorted. They had all been drinking and were pretty noisy. When the postmaster said there was only two letters, and that they were both for Bud Johnson, a colored man, a murmur of disapproval went around, and several of them insisted on a new deal.

“ ‘You can look for yourselves,’ ” said the postmaster, tossing them the bag, but after searching, and finding it empty, they were in a worse frame of mind than ever. Presently one of the number, a local politician, got up and made a speech derogatory to the administration. He insisted that the government was prejudiced against white folks, and that he had no use for the office, anyhow. Several of the others present expressed their approval of this sentiment, and a general smashing up of everything at once followed.



PRESENTLY ONE OF THE MEN
MADE A SPEECH. PAGE 4

THE OLD POST OFFICE.

During the row, the coal oil lamp was broken, the house set on fire, and everything burned up.

“Col. Bunch, who owned the property, noticing the fire, came up from his plantation below, and denounced the perpetrators of the outrage as vandals. The Colonel was a high spirited man, and didn’t stand any foolishness, but was getting along in years now and could’nt do much but talk, so that when one of the men declared that he could whip any Bunch on earth, he looked like he felt himself in a pretty close place. But the Colonel stood his ground, until at last, when the contending parties were about to come to blows, his son appeared upon the scene, and learning the cause of the trouble, sprang between the two, and, drawing his revolver, said: ‘My name is Bunch, and when my father gets to be too old to defend himself I can stand in his tracks and take his part.’

“At this juncture the shooting commenced, and I made for the boat. Everybody seemed to take sides against the Bunches, and you would have thought them a band of guerrillas from the way they kept the fight up. Pres-

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

ently I noticed the Colonel roll down the bank and stop just at the edge of the water, and then his son came staggering down, too, and fell near his side. They were both dead! We wanted to leave, but the men were afraid to go on shore to untie the lines, for the infuriated crowd were still calling for more Bunches and the colored man who had got the letters, but he had climbed a tree, and they didn't know where he was. An hour or so later, when the crowd had dispersed, he slid down from his hiding place, came aboard the boat and we hid him in the hold until we got away and he was over his fright. He said there were five men lying on the bank that the Bunches had killed before they fell.

The boat at this juncture, showing a disposition to become fractious, the pilot gave his undivided attention for a moment to the wheel, when he went on:

“But there is not much shooting along the river now, and you hardly ever hear of a feud. When there was only about three families in a county, two of them were usually engaged in an effort to exterminate the other on account of some imaginary wrong, or, maybe, promp-

THE OLE POST OFFICE.

ted by jealousy. Since the country has been settled up they are all right. I used to think myself," he went on to say, after a brief tussel with the tiller, "that what a man wanted was room, but I have found out my mistake. What he stands most in need of is plenty of good neighbors, and I find that the thicker you put people the better they get along. It makes them more human, and, besides, they come to know something, which is not the case if they live alone. I have learned a good deal myself by traveling around and seeing what is in the world, for I usually go East every summer to swap malarías."



MARK TWAIN



SIG 3.

MARK TWAIN

II.

"ABOUT the only man that ever I knew to leave the river and go to writing books," said the man at the wheel, directing his observations to the usual crowd that gathered about him in the pilot house, "was Sam Clemens. They say he's pretty rich now, but I understand he never runs across an old chum without swapping a few lies with him and paying for all the drinks. Sam never got to be much of a pilot himself, but he used to know all of them, and write them up in the papers better than anybody ever could. He was about as green a looking creature as ever come from Pike County, when he was on the old Blue Bird, way back in the fifties, and to look at him you would have thought he wasn't worth sweeping up, but he could write then till you couldn't rest, and some of the funniest things that ever was printed about the river, were gotten up by Sam. The first thing that

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

I remember of his, that set everybody talking and wondering who that boss yarn teller, Mark Twain, was, was that account about the great flood in the Mississippi, in early times, when the water was over everything, and Vicksburg and Natchez were the only dry spots between Cairo and the Gulf. At Orleans the boats landed along side of the top story of the St. Charles Hotel. Well, of course, that was the boss flood, and nobody could talk of old time boating like that; and so, Clemens got to be too big a man to stay on the river, and, as I said, he quit, and went to writing books. But he wasn't much of a pilot, anyhow. His mind didn't run that way, and when he was at the wheel he was always running over something and getting the boat into trouble. He would just as like as not go sound asleep on watch, and run the boat into the bank, head on, if you didn't keep a watch on him, and if there was a snag to be found, he would go miles out of his way just to get a whack at it, and he was never happy unless he was bouncing something. Why, you would think he was getting the biggest kind of wages from the government to just clear the river of snags, if you'd see

MARK TWAIN.

how he hustled them out of the way. But that was 'nt the worst of it, for sometimes he would lose his bearings and get lost in side streams, and it would cost the Captain half he would make on the trip to get back to the Mississippi.

“One day the old Blue Bird—that was the last boat he steered on—got to racing with the Yellow Hammer, a Wabash packet, and as the water was pretty high, Sam thought he would show off by running a chute and coming out two or three miles ahead. Well, in he goes, full tilt, picking his way through the timber, and keeping his eyes on the limbs that reached near to the chimneys, so as not to get them knocked overboard. The Bird was just flying through the woods, and Sam, he was a sweating like a bound boy at a husking. And the wheel! You just ought to have seen it spin; you'd have thought, to look at Sam, that he was at last doing some diamond breastpin piloting. And I reckon for a spell he thought he was, but, in about two hours the mate, he comes on deck, for, as it was the second watch, the Captain was asleep, and says to Sam as how he thought the Bird was going to Memphis that trip.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“That’s where we’re going,” says Sam, as soon as he could gather wind enough to speak.

“Making a side run to Jacksonport, eh?” says the mate.

“Haven’t heard of it,” says Sam.

“Haven’t, eh?” said the mate, looking at him curious like.

“No,” says Sam, pulling the wheel hard down, so as to bring the boat round a short turn.

“Then, what on earth are you doing in White River?” says the mate.

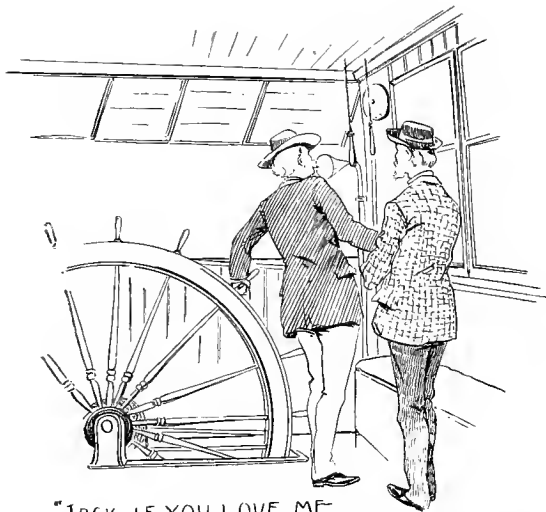
“In White River?” says Sam, turning white about the gills, and shaking like he had a chill.

“That’s where we are,” says the mate, “and you are twenty miles from the mouth, at that.”

“Oh, my!” says Sam; “I thought I was in a chute.”

“Well, says the mate, “you’d better turn this boat around and shoot out of here before the old man gets up, or you’ll be looking for a skiff to get nack to the Mississippi. Do you hear me?”

“Then Sam, he turn’s the Bird around, and hollers down to the engineer, ‘Jack, if you love me, give her steam.’



"JACK IF YOU LOVE ME,
GIVE HER STEAM" PAGE. 14.

MARK TWAIN.

“Well, the mate kind of liked Sam for his funny yarns, so he kept it all from the old man till the boat got back to Orleans, when Sam quit, and that was the last of his piloting.”



SI KECK



SIG 4.

SI KECK

III.

“SPEAKING about bad men,” said the man at the wheel, continuing his remarks on the following day, “there were some pretty hard cases on the river forty or fifty years ago. Why, some of them mates thought nothing of dumping a man overboard and shooting daylight through him. About the worst among them, I allow, was old Si Keck. He was the blue-ribbon mate, and don’t you forget it. When he said anything to a rouster it had to go, or there would be a corpse ready for the carpenter to measure for a box. Keck always run in the coast trade, and love or money couldn’t get him to go above Bayou Sara. He used to say his Southern blood wouldn’t permit him to go nearer to the Yankees than that, and along in the Spring, when the season was over, and Captain Sinchburger had concluded to make a few trips to St. Louis or Louisville, Si would always stop off until she got back in

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

her regular trade. He would load the boat up and get her ready, but before she backed out, he would turn her over to some * 'snow-bird,' and loaf around Orleans until she got back. He was the Southernest man in his principles you ever saw, and would just as soon think of going without his whisky as his gumbo and dry rice. Must have them every day, and cooked, too, by a Creole that knew the combination. Said a Yankee never could learn it. And besides, he allowed these dishes didn't taste like themselves when you got above the Louisiana line. Of course a man like that was pretty aristocratic, and when Western mates came to Orleans, he would always give them a wide berth. They used to stand around on the levee and see him handle his men, and as soon as they got out of port commenced practicing his style on their own crews; for, you see, Keck set the pegs for all of them. And you'd think a man like that would never be able to get a crew, but he did, and a picked one, too, for you see, he knew a good man when he saw him, and could treat him right; but when a slinker made a mistake and shipped with him

* A Northener.

SI KECK.

—oh, my! That's when the trouble would set in. A man might as well try to beat his way to paradise, without salvation, as to monkey with him. And to try to defy him was just dead sure to send another victim to his private burying ground.

“Well, that was Si Keck up to the very day he got into that fracas with Slush on the old Elephant. You see, the boat had been racing with the Chinkapin, a red-hot Red River craft, and it was nip-and-tuck which would keep in the lead. They burned up all the pine knots and bacon aboard, and were getting into a close place, for the Pin was gaining on them right along, and it looked like nothing would keep her from going by. Keck, he was just wild, for he had never run on a boat that had allowed herself to be passed; so he goes rushing back to the kitchen and asked Slush if he had any grease. Well, Slush allowed he hadn't, for he knew if the boat got hold of it and burned it up, he would never get a cent for it, and it was worth about six dollars a barrel. But Keck goes to fumbling around under the cylinder timbers, and found a lot of bacon rinds, tallow and such, covered up with a lot of boards so

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

nobody would see it, and told Slush to roll it out, and to be live about it. Then he goes forward to send the men for it, but when they got there Slush had dumped it all overboard. He allowed if he was to get nothing for it, he would rather the fish should have it. Seeing what was up, Keck, he rings the bell for a landing, as if he had to stop to put out a passenger, for he knew if he stood out any longer, the Chinkapin would go by them. As soon as the Elephant touched the bank, out goes the stage, and the next moment something was seen to scoot over it like it was greased. It was Slush and Keck after him. Of course, everybody thought there was going to be a funeral, but there wasn't. Slush was too fast for the old man. Keck followed him about five miles into the country, when he ran out of wind. The crew found him curled up in a fence corner, so tired out he didn't know what his name was. They helped him back to the boat, but he took no more interest in that race, and when she got to Orleans he quit the river.

“About Slush? Well, he never was heard of after.”



IT WAS SLUSH AND THE MATE/AFTER HIM.
PAGE 22.



A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN



A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN

IV.

“**T**HEN we had some moral men on the river, too,” continued the man at the wheel, after refreshing himself with a drink brought from the bar below. “There was old Captain Jerry Flumkins that used to run the Jim Crank in the lower Ohio trade. You see, the boat used to make a trip a week, and Captain Jerry was always particular to have her get back home before twelve o’clock on Saturday night, because he had conscientious scruples against working on Sunday, and if he got caught out on account of fog or low water, and didn’t make his time, he’d just tie right up in the woods and wouldn’t budge till Monday morning. He used to say that he built all his boats according to Scripture, and run them according to Scripture, and when he had to trespass on the Lord’s day to make a living, he’d just quit boating and go to preaching.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

Moral! Don't talk! He wouldn't carry a barrel of whisky for his dearest friend, and you couldn't buy a drop of liquor on the Crank for love or money. Of course, she wasn't ever bothered with gamblers, for they always gave her a wide berth; but white horses and preachers the old man just honed for, and would land anywhere, day or night, to take them aboard. Said he didn't see how it could be bad luck to carry men or beasts that were in the service of the Lord, and if it was, he just wanted some of the bad luck, and wanted it bad.

“That's the kind of a man old Cap'n Jerry Flumkins was, and they all knew him. They used to talk about him a good deal, and make fun of him, but I take notice he went right on just the same, and always had a good boat under him and money to pay off the crew. And accomodating! Why, he thought nothing of landing just to leave a woman a drawing of tea or a roast of fresh meat when she happened to have company; and on Mondays, when everybody was at the river washing, he just had the steward stand on the forecastle with bundles of soap and starch done up ready to toss to everybody that asked for them. Well, of

A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN.

course, there couldn't anybody run a man like that out of the trade, and they didn't try to. There wasn't anything that the people could do for Jerry that they wouldn't do, especially the moral, church going community, for they knew his record.

"For a long time everything went well with the old man, but one day the Crank took a sheer on the pilot and run out on the bank till her bow was about twenty feet out of the water. She was in an awful fix, and no mistake! The crew sparred and heaved at her for three days, but couldn't get her baek into the river, and it began to look like she'd have to stay where she was until the water rose unless they could get about a hundred tons of something to put her stern down so that the bow would swing clear. Old Captain Jerry knew that this weight was all he needed to put him afloat again, but where to find it was what troubled him.

"At last, an idea strikes him. The boys said it was a vision, because he used to see visions and dream dreams, as the Bible says that good old men sometimes do, and so he lights out and slips up to where the Methodists

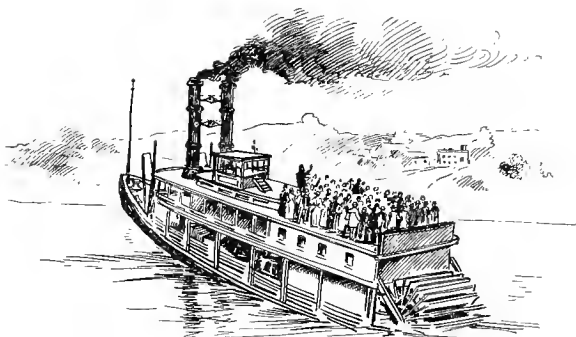
THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

were holding a camp-meeting about a mile off, made a speech, and tells everybody about his troubles. Of course, they all wanted to help old Captain Jerry out, because he was a member of that denomination and they knew him. So the leaders came together and wanted to know what they could do for him.

“ ‘Well,’ ” said Capt. Jerry, “ ‘if it wouldn’t be asking too much, I would like to have you adjourn this meeting to the Jim Crank. She is lying down there awful hard aground, and as nothing we can do has any effect on her I have concluded, as a last resort, to try the power of prayer. It seems to me that a camp-meeting of this size ought to have some weight with Providence.’ ”

“The motion was put and unanimously carried, to adjourn to the boat. When they arrived old Captain Jerry marched them all on board, and told them to go aft. ‘Go aft, my brothers and sisters,’ he said, ‘go aft.’ ”

“When everything was ready to begin the meeting, he ordered the fireman to get up a good head of steam, the men to heave hard on the capstan and get a strain on the spars. Then he goes aft himself, and asks one of the



THEN HE WHISPERED TO THE
ENGINEER BACK HER HARD. PAGE. 29.

A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN.

deacons to lead in prayer. The old man waited till the meeting got well warmed up and the deacons began to respond with their fervent 'amen's,' and then he whispered to the engineer, 'back her hard,' and, sure enough, away she slipped into the river like she was greased.

"Now, Captain Jerry Flumkins was what I call a practical christian. Whenever he got in a close place, and felt obliged to ask the Lord to help him out, he always used judgment and fixed things so as to make it as easy on Providence as he could, and you could just win more money on old Captain Jerry Flumkins getting an answer to prayer than any man that ever followed the business; do you hear me?"



EXPLOSION of the BLUE GOOSE



EXPLOSION OF THE BLUE GOOSE

V.

"TALKING about hard times," broke out the man at the wheel, later on the same day, although no one had mentioned the subject, "you ought to have been with us in the summer of seventy-two in Orleans, when the yellow fever was so bad, if you wanted to know what it is to be hard up. You see, it was like this: The Blue Goose was running in the Ouachita River that season, carrying the mail. She was a small side-wheel craft, but she was old as any of them, and was known in every Southern bayou and creek. You couldn't put her into a trade where she wasn't popular, and she didn't allow any boat to run her out. Game? That's no name for it! You just ought to have seen her wheels buzz when anything tried to get past her. You'd have thought she was a bicycle on a smooth road racing for the championship. And her engi-

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

neer! Talk about your hot men these times! Why, he'd burn all the bacon and lard on the boat before he would see the Blue Goose passed by any other boat. When some crack packet came along and wanted to go by, he would work her up to a heat that would make her look like a greased blue streak on the war-path! Excitement! Well, I should say so! And free drinks—oh, my! Why, there was always a keg of good whisky, with a glass at hand, sitting on the forecastle, and everybody just helped themselves. That's the kind of craft the Blue Goose was, but towards the last she began to break down, and had a hard tussel to keep up with the procession.

“One night she got to racing with another boat that was about to get away with her, but our Captain, being an ambitious man, said he couldn't allow it, and he'd win the race or blow the Goose up. Well, they had it nip-and-tuck all night, and you'd have thought the river was on fire to see the light they made—chimneys red-hot and the blaze shooting out of their tops. And smoke—worse than a tar-kiln. The other boat kept creeping up on us, and the old Goose saw she had to do some-



GOT TO RACING WITH ANOTHER BOAT.

PAGE 34.

EXPLOSION OF THE BLUE GOOSE.

thing quick or lose her good name, and all of a sudden she let go her boilers, and you never saw such a scattering of things. Well, what was left of us floated back down the river to Orleans.

“As I said, the yellow fever was raging; and as we were all broke, and had no boarding house, we were obliged to stand the long watch, (stay up all night). For four months we never saw a bed or had our clothes off, but we come through all right and added something to our experience that has been of benefit, to me at least, ever since. It convinced me that the Creator doesn't impose on his creatures conditions that are not contemplated and provided for in His system. In prosperity, we rise to the occasion, and acquire the additional strength necessary to meet our responsibilities; in adversity we contract our tentacles, so to speak, and shrinking within ourselves, become, in a measure, reconciled to fate. But we were all young, and indifference is not a quality that lays a very strong hold on youth. We were full of hope, though empty enough in other respects, and our energies were stimulated by our necessities. Self-preservation, the first

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

law of nature, asserted itself and supplied the motive power essential to our success.

“We had but one idea, and that was to live. And in this connection, our only avenue of hope lay in the direction of the saloon, the free lunch! So, we set about to cultivate it. Talk about ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ and ‘The Old Oaken Bucket!’ Well, there are other memories that are not to be overlooked when summing up the cherished recollections of childhood days of some of us. And the free lunch is among them!



THE MYSTERY of CATFISH POINT



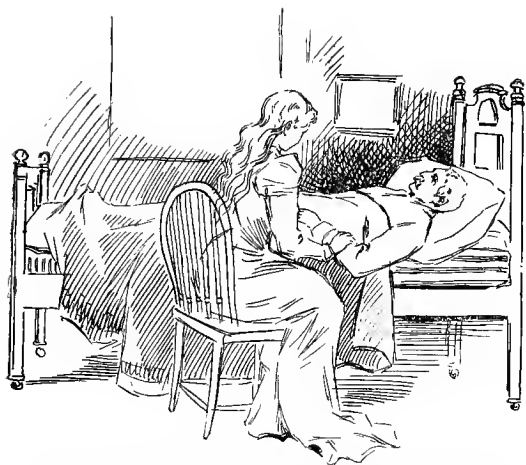
THE MYSTERY OF CATFISH POINT

VI.

“THEN the Mississippi has its mysteries, too,” the pilot went on, peering into the perspective, which was slightly intercepted by a small island that was covered by a thrifty growth of young cottonwood trees, “and there isn’t an inch of it that couldn’t tell its story if it only had the gift of speech. Now, there’s the mystery of Catfish Point, for instance, there on the right. The timber has all been cleared away and a big plantation has taken its place, but the old hut and the two graves are still there. The scene is always pointed out to travelers, and I reckon I’ve told the story a hundred times. I wasn’t on the boat myself, but came along on the Walk on the Water, two days after, and learned all about the disaster, and I’ve kept track of it ever since. It happened in the winter-time when the river was pretty high, and you can see for yourself how wide it is—three miles from bank to

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

bank. The Swamp Angel, that was the name of the boat, was on her way South, when she took fire in the middle of the night and burned and sank. Nobody knows just where she lays, but she is buried in the sand somewhere along here. More than one hundred lives were lost. One of them was the wife of the man that they called the mystery, and who lived in the hut there. Of course, he is dead now and one of those graves is his and the other is his wife's. He managed to get her ashore, but she died soon after from fright and exposure, and the blow so affected his mind that he never was himself after. Some wood-choppers happening along found them under the bank the next morning. They buried her and took him to their hut, but his reason was gone, and they never learned who he was or where he was from. That's why they called him the mystery. They fed and clothed him for twenty years, when he died, but he never spoke. He just sat all day in a cane-bottomed chair, looking at the river, like he was watching for her. The men used to say that she visited him nights, that is, her spirit did, and would sit by his bed for hours while he was asleep.



THEY USED TO SAY SHE VISITED HIM NIGHTLY,
THAT IS HER SPIRIT DID. PAGE 40.

THE MYSTERY OF CATFISH POINT.

People who were looking for lost relatives used to come here and look at him but he was never recognized. Yes, the river has its mysteries.

‘‘Why, if you put monuments over everybody buried along the banks, they’d be so thick you would think you’re running through a graveyard, and if they’d put them over everybody lying under that innocent looking water, there wouldn’t be room between them for the drift to find its way through. That’s the kind of a place the Mississippi is, though, of course, you wouldn’t think so, for you only see it the way it is now, and don’t know its history. Why, sometimes on moonlight nights when I’m on watch, it seems to me that I can see the spirits moving over the water as thick as bubbles. Some of them had hold of one another’s hands, the way they did when they took to the water to keep from being burned up with the steamboats. They were mostly young married folks that were going on their bridal tours, I always think, for I have seen them jump over that way myself more than once, and I knew then that they would never be separated, because if death couldn’t do it, nothing could, I reckon.



**THE WAY THE CAPTAIN
FIGURED IT**



THE WAY THE CAPTAIN FIGURED IT

VII.

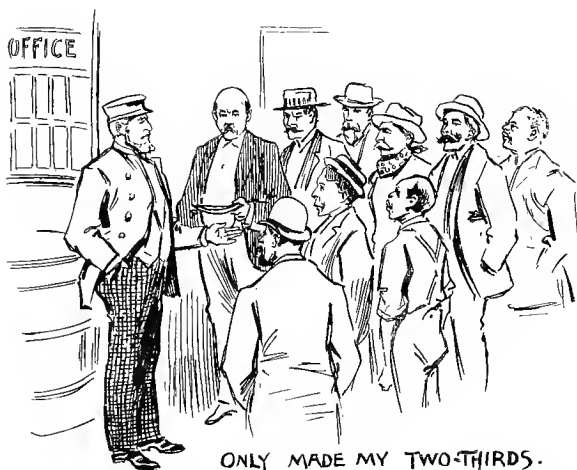
"THEY used to tell a pretty good story on old Captain Sam Fluffer," broke out the man at the wheel, after coming on watch the next day, "though I can't vouch for its truth, for I always found old Sam to be a pretty square man. It is like this: You see, Captain Fluffer had just brought out a new Red River boat, and she was lying at the New Orleans landing, waiting for the season to open. There were already enough boats in the trade, and more than enough, but the old man said that was no fault of his. He wanted some of the business too, and if somebody had to suffer he couldn't help it; business was business. But it so happened that wages just then were up pretty high, and as he didn't want to take the chances of losing money, he was in a quandary what to do. At last, an idea strikes him and he put up his sign to leave. The men on the levee, seeing the boat was going out, went

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

on board and wanted to ship. They kept tackling him for a job, and wanted to know what he was paying.

“‘Well,’ said the old man, who was sitting on the boiler deck and taking things easy, ‘I don’t know; I always want to do what’s right; there’s nothing small about me. How would it do to give the crew one-third of what the boat makes?’

“‘The boys got together and consulted. The pilots and engineers thought one-third was pretty good, and soon the rest of the crew decided to take their chances too, so they sets in and made the trip. When the boat got back to port, and the cotton was all out, the decks scrubbed and everything put in its place, and the crew was all dressed up ready to go ashore and have some fun as soon as they got their money, the old man, noticing them standing around the office, said: ‘Well, boys, as the trip is over, I guess we’d better now settle up.’ So he goes to work figuring and thinking for awhile, and then turned to the crew and said, ‘I’m mighty sorry for you, boys, mighty sorry for you, but the fact is, there isn’t anything coming to you.’



ONLY MADE MY TWO-THIRDS.

PAGE.47.

THE WAY THE CAPTAIN FIGURED IT.

“ ‘Nothing coming to us!’ said one of the men, ‘how’s that? didn’t the boat make any money?’

“ ‘Yes,’ said Captain Fluffer, ‘she made some money; there’s no denying that, because figures won’t lie; but you see, boys, *she only made my two-thirds!*’”



THE BROADHORN



SIG 8.

THE BROADHORN

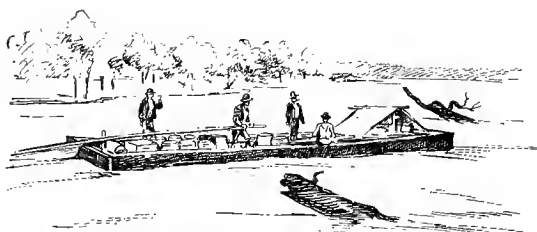
VIII.

“SPEAKING about flatboating,” said the man at the wheel, the subject having been suggested by the appearance of a number of produce boats at no great distance that were floating lazily down the river, “there is’nt much of it done now, but there was lots of it done in old times. A good flatboat pilot, forty or fifty years ago, made plenty of money, and lots of them used to wear broadcloth clothes and kid gloves, and as fine a gold watch as you’d wish to look at. I commenced that way myself. And it isn’t as easy to steer a flatboat as you might think. You’ve got to study the river a good deal before you can know much about it, and some never get to know it—they ain’t gifted that way—and a man that hasn’t water sense has got no business pilot-ing. You have got to know just where you are when you come on watch the darkest night,

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

by the looks of the trees and the way the land lays without being told, before you're a pilot, and some never can learn it. They let on they know, and get up and say, 'Well, here we are,' and how they'll take her till morning, when it's all put on, and they know it. Them kind of pilots always want to hug some other boat; they do it—and the river is full of them. A good many of them never see it only when it's high and everything is covered up, and they have no idea how it looks in dead low water, when everything is sticking out.

'But that's just where the science comes in. Just study the signs and you are all right. When you see a long, slim break winking and boiling up in a nervous sort of way, that's only a log; but you had better go to one side of it, for it isn't good to run over anything that breaks the skin of the water. You'll know a wreck, for it makes a bigger scar and a shakier looking spot, and don't go near it. If you don't know where they are, tie up at night, and keep a look out when you are running. You can always see snags and keep off of them—that is, if you know how—but don't try to keep off of them too soon. Wait till you see which



WHEN THE RIVER IS HIGH
PAGE 52

THE BROADHORN.

way you are leaning before you make up your mind. If you are well out from shore, so that you are not afraid to go on the inside, hold her right on it until you get close to it, and then give her a little twist with the oar, and she's all right, for sometimes if you try to pull out so as to go on the outside, you can't, and you get into a close place. She'll go one side or the other if you nurse her a little; and if you don't she will be apt to ride it. Your sawyer is not going to bother you much, though some of them make a terrible racket, and it wouldn't do a boat's bottom any good to have one of them pounding it. They don't float very fast, for one end is on the bottom of the river and keeps stopping, and that pulls the other under, and it doesn't come up until it starts again. That's the reason they call them 'sawyers,' for they keep ripping the river up. There's no hills along the lower river to speak of, and the highest land is along the river, and was made by the overflow, and that's what makes everything break for the swamps, because it's lowest back there. You don't have to stop and put out a mark to see what the water is doing, if your'e a pilot, but just watch the drift.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

When it's rising, everything's skirmishing for the woods, and when it's falling, it makes for the middle of the river so as not to get left. That's the reason you don't have to use the sweeps much when you are on a falling river, and lying in the trough. Now, about your high-water marks; don't ever put them on young cottonwoods, unless they're dead, for they grow about five feet every year, and every time you come along you'll be taking old-time high-water, and pointing out your marks, and trying to make everybody think that the world is going backwards, and everthing that's worth seeing has been seen. And the banks are just as bad. You come along here to-day and you find a good square bank and a plantation behind it, and the next trip you wonder where it's gone, and where your high-water marks are, and then you commence thinking that this is a world of changes, and this is where they happen oftenest. But steamboat piloting is different. Then you have to do your best work going up stream.



A FIRE HUNT



A FIRE HUNT

IX.

"IT was on one of these flatboat trips," pursued the man at the wheel, who seemed to never tire of recounting his early adventures, "that I went on my first fire hunt, and I tell you this used to be great sport. You never hear of it, though, now. Old Captain Jim Rider was our pilot. He's dead this twenty years, and so are most of the others that were on the boat, I reckon. We had been floating peacefully all day watching the islands and banks, and the boats passing up and down, till at last a breeze sprang up, and Captain Rider said to Hines, his assistant, who was at the steering oar, 'I reckon you'd better let her come to jack before it gets too rough.'"

"Preparations were now made to land, and a half an hour later we were tied up to the bank opposite a dense canebrake. After supper we all gathered on the top of the boat to cool off,

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

for the weather was pretty hot, when presently Captain Rider remarked, that as we probably wouldn't get away till daylight, it mightn't be a bad thing to go fire-hunting, and try and bring in some game. Of course, we didn't have to be asked twice to undertake a thing like that, for we all knew there was lots of fun and excitement in it, so we began at once to get ready.

Hines and one of the hands volunteered to remain in charge of the boat and keep a light burning on the shore, so that we could properly direct our course on returning, should we strike the river above or below the starting point. The guns, which were always kept loaded, were brought out, together with an ample supply of ammunition, and two sacks of pine knots, and a torch basket, procured by Wilkes, one of the men, a few days before from the keeper of a wood-yard, in anticipation of an occasion of this character. Marsh, another hand, who had had experience in this way, was to carry the torch basket, and Jonas, another boy, and I, the sacks.

“At length the start was made, and after proceeding a short distance we came to a bayou

A FIRE HUNT.

which it was decided to follow, both in search of game and in returning to the boat, a precaution that would prevent the possibility of getting lost. We hadn't gone far when there was an abrupt halt and the guns were cocked.

“ ‘Hold the light a little higher, Ike,’ said Captain Rider. ‘There, that’ll do.’ ”

“ ‘In an instant there came the sharp report of the three guns so close together that they were scarcely distinguishable, when Wilkes cried:

“ ‘There they go; they’re makin’ for the bayou.’ ”

“ ‘All eyes now followed the beasts, which proved to be two immense alligators, but in a moment they plunged into the water and disappeared.

“ ‘Wait a minute,’ said Capt. Rider, ‘they’ll come up again.’ ”

“ ‘The light now shone full upon the surface of the bayou, which soon regained its usual smoothness, and the least disturbance could be readily discerned. No one had spoken or stirred since Captain Rider put them on their guard.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

‘Bye-and-bye Wilkes whispered, ‘There they are.’

‘Capt. Rider and the other men with arms caught the cue and slowly lowered their guns. Marsh, who was familiar with the habits of alligators, perceived their movements at once, though I saw only what I supposed to be two soaked logs lying nearly covered by the water.

‘Bang! went the guns a second time, when the inanimate looking objects sprang into life for a moment and again disappeared.

‘‘It never phased them,’ said Capt. Rider; ‘didn’t you hear the thud of the balls against their backs? might shoot at them all night for all they care.’

‘The torch basket was now replenished and the guns re-loaded, after which we continued on our way in search of more noble game, the fruitless episode just mentioned having aroused every one to a degree of enthusiasm we made no attempt to conceal.

‘We had proceeded only a short distance when Captain Rider paused, and lowering his rifle, said:

‘‘She-e-e-e, there’s something in the timber there; don’t you see it?’

A FIRE HUNT.

“Yes,” came from the others simultaneously; ‘must be a flock of deer,’ continued Capt. Rider, “by the looks of their eyes. I’ll hold on the one in the middle, and Wilkes, you draw a bead on the one to the right. and Jim can have full sweep on the left. Now, be careful, and we’ll get a haul this time, for there’s plenty of them there.”

“The report of the three guns rang out sharply through the woods, followed closely by a rustling sound among the leaves, showing that something had been stampeded. As soon as the guns were re-loaded, we moved forward, anxious to investigate the result of the shooting. Marsh shook the coals from the torch-basket, causing the light to glow with renewed brilliancy, and all strained their eyes in hopes of catching glimpses of a slain deer or two, or whatever it might be, for it was hardly probable that all the shots could have missed. Wilkes took the lead, and was the first to announce the result:

“ ‘Three fat deer, and all shot in the head.’

“Without loss of time Wilkes and Marsh removed the hides, and put them, with the saddles and hind-quarters, into one of the sacks,

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

and the pine-knots in the other (an arrangement easily effected, since a large share of the knots had already been consumed), and the forward movement was resumed.

‘ ‘Presently we were startled by a low, moaning cry, which Capt. Rider informed us came from a ‘painter’ (panther), and a little later on we were attracted by a loud scratching sound made by a bear in its hurried descent from a tree, for we caught sight of the beast just as it touched the earth, though it disappeared in the darkness before any one could fire.

‘ ‘ ‘We’ll go a little further,’ said Captain Rider, glancing first at his watch and then in the direction of the fleeing bear, ‘and then, if we don’t find anything more, we’ll come back this way and try our luck again, for them carcasses will be pretty apt to draw something.’

‘ ‘ ‘At length we came to another halt, when those in the lead exchanged a few hurried remarks, at the conclusion of which Capt. Rider said to Marsh, ‘Step back a little with the torch, Ike.’ The request was obeyed, when Captain Rider went on. ‘It’s only a Jack-o-lantern; the swamps are full of ’em.’



IT'S ONLY A JACK-O'-LANTERN

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A FIRE HUNT.

“The object referred to shone like a ball of fire for a moment and then went out, but presently others appeared further on with like results. The ground by this time was found to be soft and marshy, and in some places nearly covered with water, so that it was thought advisable to go no farther, but to return to the boat, which at best could not be reached until past midnight.

“When we came back to the place where the deer had been killed, we found nothing to mark the spot except some stains of blood on the ground, every vestige of the carcasses having been devoured, or carried off during the short interval by wild beasts.”



THE RANTEDODLER



SIG 10.

THE RANTEDODLER

X.

OWING to the stormy weather, which prevailed for a day and a night, the man at the wheel had the pilot house almost entirely to himself, but it finally cleared up, and the usual crowd gathered about him, all anxious to hear the veteran continue his quaint stories. The surrounding scenes evidently suggested nothing to talk about, but after a few moments of silence he drew on his memory, and began:

“Some of those old time boats used to seem to be almost human, and one of the best of them was the Rantedodler, that used to run in the Orleans and Yazoo trade, way back in the sixties. She was a side-wheel craft with wide cotton guards, and tossed as high smoke as anything that ever went up the coast, and Sandy Buzzer, her pilot, used to say that he’d rather steer her than any boat he was ever on. She seemed to know the river and landings as well as he did, but had a mind of her own, you

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

bet, and when things didn't go just to suit her, she made it hot, as sure as you're born.

“The first rampage the Rantedodler got on, old Sandy used to say, was one trip when they piled the cotton on her so high that you could only see the chimneys sticking out and the water was four inches deep on the lower deck. Well she wouldn't have it, that's all, and when she got out into the current, she tossed it all into the river. Did you ever see a boat dump her cotton? Well, it's done sometimes one way and sometimes another—most always by the wind or current striking her, and listing her to one side so that the bales on that guard drop off, and then the weight on the other side keels her over, and away it goes. Most always the chimneys go, and sometimes the pilot. Of course, men don't like to ship on boats that have a fashion of cutting up that way, and they always give them a wide berth if they know it.

“As I said, she was a high-toned boat in her day, and had as big a name as anybody's boat, and was popular and made money for her owners till you couldn't rest. It seemed as if she never would wear out, for she looked as

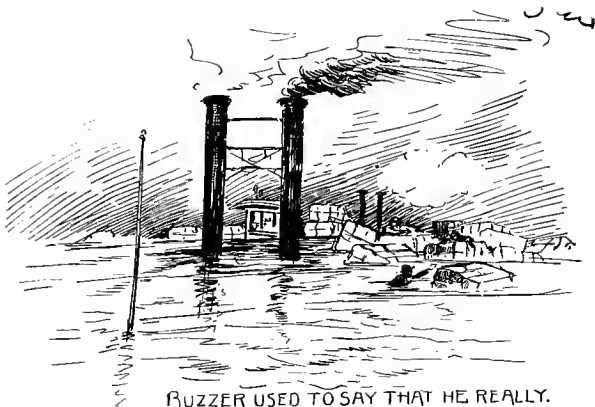
THE RANTEDODLER.

new as ever when she was fifteen years old. But towards the last business got awfully dull and they made her work too cheap, and for the first time in her life she commenced to lose money. It wasn't her fault, for the boat has'n't been built that could carry freight cheaper than the Rantedodler could. Well, you see, when she got to coming home without any money to pay her bills, the owners began finding fault, and it seemed she lost all her spirit, and got so she took no interest in anything. Sandy said he never saw anything like the way she changed. It was just dead pulling all the time to keep her from running into the woods at every turn, and as to sand-bars and snags, why she seemed determined to bounce every one that came in sight. Bells! Paid no attention to them more than if she was asleep. Got to be a regular pilot-killer, and no mistake. Course, as I said, nobody would steer a boat like that long, and Buzzer made up his mind to quit her as soon as he could get her back home. But she didn't give him a chance to do it. She kept getting more and more stubborn, and when she came to Natchez bend, where the river was deepest, she concluded to

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

quit. You never saw anything go to pieces like her. Never gave anybody any warning that she was going to dump them as if they was a flock of ducks. But they never blamed her. She always fed well and paid well until her luck turned against her, and when she had to cut down expenses, and the crew began to find fault with the grub, it just seemed to break her heart.

“The first thing anybody knew, she began to stagger and roll about just as if paralyzed, and when the mate opened up the hatch, he found her full of water. The pilot started to point her for the shore, but she wouldn’t have it, and went down so deep that I reckon nothing short of Gabriel’s horn will ever raise her. That was the last of the old Rantedodler. Buzzer used to say he really believed that she committed suicide.”



BUZZER USED TO SAY THAT HE REALLY.
BELIEVED SHE COMMITTED SUICIDE.

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THE GAMBLER



THE GAMBLER

XI.

“THE Mississippi gambler,” went on the man at the wheel, changing the subject, “was once a terror to the traveling community, but he is now a thing of the past. I knew them all, and have seen many of them killed in fights—sometimes two and three in one day. These died, as they say, ‘with their boots on,’ but I saw one die a natural death, and I’ll tell you how it was: I was in the hospital at the time, sick with the fever, when a middle-aged man was brought in and given the bed next to me. He was apparently in good health, although he soon began to show symptoms of derangement, and broke out: ‘They’ve no business here; let me out; they’re policemen and want to raid the house? Do you hear? I feel so—so—; I don’t know how I’m —. Go on with the game, don’t let it stop on my account. But keep quiet and don’t quarrel that way, the

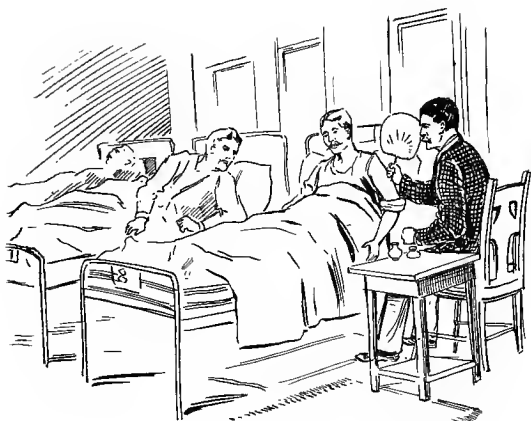
THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

man's excited about losing his money and—there, you've shot him—what's that he says? Send for my wife, quick, quick—stand back and give him air. There she comes! make way for her. Did you ever hear such a noise? she's weeping over him—weeping-ing-ing.'

'Here the man uttered a groan and turned over on his side, and remained for a moment silent. Presently he continued: 'The black sheep of the family—had respectable parents who read their Bible and went to church; that's the old story, repenting at last; giving the lie to his whole life. Oh! my head! what makes it ring so?' There was another pause and then he said: 'The old man with the scythe is dealing this time—He plays a square game and treats all alike, though nobody can beat him. When he calls for your chips you'll hand them in—you'll hand them in. How old he looks.'

'“He must be a gambler,” said one of the nurses, ‘and thinks he’s in a faro room.’

'“What a long road we’ve come,” went on the sick man, ‘to get here, and how far it reaches back and winds and twists. Don’t make the pillows so hot; they burn, take them



HE MUST BE A GAMBLER
SAID ONE OF THE NURSES. PAGE 74

THE GAMBLER.

away—take them away. Will daylight never come—never—ne-v-er? Are you going to let me stay here and die? Don't you see my head's too big for the house? It's pushing the sides out, out into the dark—I'm, I'm so—.'

“Here he ceased his raving, and lay with his face towards me with closed eyes. Our beds were so close together that we might have touched each other had we made the effort, and watching him closely, I noticed a small wound just above the right eye, which I pointed out in a whisper to the nurse, who said: ‘That’s where he was shot, and the ball’s in his head yet. He’ll not last much longer.’

“With this the nurse re-adjusted the bandage which had become displaced, when the sufferer broke out again: ‘Sporting men—ha-ha! that’s what we call ourselves. Will that ice water never come, come—that sounds very good, but the world knows us better, and says we’re gamblers—gamblers.’ There was another pause when he cried out, ‘I’m done with the whole business—don’t do that! wait till I get out before you turn the gas out. The passage is dark and the steps dangerous—there, I knew it—falling—fall—fall.’

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“Here he opened his eyes and lay staring at me so long that I began to feel uneasy, when the nurse came along and said : ‘He’s out of his misery.’ ”



HAD A CHRISTIAN MOTHER



HAD A CHRISTIAN MOTHER

XII.

“WHILE on the subject of gambling,” pursued the man at the wheel, “I’ll tell you of a circumstance that happened when I first went on the river. We were running in the New Orleans and Little Rock trade, and were on our way south with a cargo of cotton and a cabin full of people. Among the passengers was a clerical looking young man who rarely spoke to any one, but spent his time, apparently, in reading and meditation. It was on a Sunday morning that he came aboard, and two or three hours later, when the tables were off the floor and the cabin straightened up, he entered the ladies’ cabin and laying an open Bible on the table before him, requested all to come forward and take seats, as he desired to offer a few remarks appropriate to the day and the occasion. Then he gave out a familiar hymn, led the singing, made a brief prayer and preached a sermon. For the rest

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

of the day a moral atmosphere seemed to pervade the cabin, and the usual games were dispensed with, but on the lower deck the rattling of dice, and the sound attending the handling of cards were still to be heard. During the afternoon he strolled below, and stood for a time watching the gamblers in silence. Then he went out on the after guards and spent an hour or so looking at a number of blooded race horses which were on their way to New Orleans to take part in the Spring meeting. As though for pastime. he opened a conversation with their keepers, and questioned them about their blood and speed, evidently taking great interest in the animals, though regretting the fact that they were race horses. He said gambling was wicked and racing was only a game of chance.

‘‘The next morning the faro game was renewed in the cabin, the barkeeper was kept busy serving drinks and the rattling of coins indicated that large sums of money were changing hands. In addition to the players the table was surrounded by a number of spectators, and among them the clerical looking man already mentioned. He stood looking at the

HAD A CHRISTIAN MOTHER.

game for a few moments, and then observed, in a meek tone, that he didn't see how men could be so worldly as to gamble for money. For his part he had a christian mother, who had taught him that games of chance were wicked, and turning away he began to stroll up and down the cabin, apparently in deep meditation. Presently he was joined by a 'capper' who endeavored to persuade him to try his luck.

"For a time he resisted, but he finally consented to leave a ten, just for the novelty of of the thing, and beside, he was in need of money with which to pay off the debt on his church, and the end might, in a measure, justify the means. The dealer handed him a 'stack of chips,' when he remarked in an indifferent way, that he might as well lose them on one card as another, and he went the pile on the ace. He won, and as the dealer paid the bet he appeared grieved, and said it looked like putting his hand into a man's pocket to take his money that way, so he thought he'd leave the chips where they were, but for fear he might win again he'd just 'copper.' When the turn was made, and his pile was doubled,

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

he looked almost heartbroken, and sighed sadly. Then he removed the copper, and changing to another card, told the dealer to go ahead. He won again, and the next time he put on the copper and made another winning, and continued to win until he had about broke the bank. Then he arose and said he guessed he'd quit. The dealer and cappers urged him to continue, and refused to cash his chips; he pulled out a bowie knife and calmly remarked that he tho't they had better. He had a christian mother, and she had taught him it was a sin to kill. As he pushed the roll of bills into his pocket, he turned to the Captain, who was standing near, and said that he guessed he'd get off at the next landing. His moral training might lead to trouble if he stayed aboard much longer. The Captain was glad enough to get rid of the man, so he brought the boat to. When the stage was launched four rough looking customers, who had been conducting the various games on the lower deck, came forward leading five of the race horses. They were all armed; and after marching the animals ashore they mounted four of them and the clerical looking man quietly bestrode the other, which



THAT'S JOHN A. MURREL AND HIS GANG
OF OUTLAWS

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HAD A CHRISTIAN MOTHER.

was the finest of all. Resistance, of course, would have been in vain, so the boat drew in the stage and went on her way. When we had got a short distance from the shore one of the passengers remarked: 'That's John A. Murrell and his gang of outlaws. We recognized each other when he came aboard, but I knew it would be death to make his identity known.' "



BILL SMITH.



BILL SMITH

XIII.

“ONE of the gamest men that was ever on the river,” said the man at the wheel as he gave it a turn or too, just after coming on watch the next day, “was that mulatto, Bill Smith, that they killed at Cairo, about forty years ago. He was a barber on boats for a long time before he settled there and went into the gambling business on a flatboat. Smith was a live coon, made money hand over fist, and soon got to own one of the biggest faro games in the town. Well, of course, the white gamblers didn’t like to see a free ‘nigger’ take the lead of them in that way, so they called a meeting and resolved that it was a disgrace to the sporting profession to have Smith in it, and they appointed a committee to call on him and notify him to pull out and get away before sundown or they would set his boat on fire. Smith met them on the forecastle of his boat and he made a speech.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

‘‘He said: ‘Gentlemen, I’m half white and free born, and I’m here to stay.’

‘‘‘We’ll give you till sundown,’ they again said, ‘and if you’re here then, there’ll be music in the air.’

‘‘They then went up to the saloon and began to drink worse than ever, all the time keeping watch upon the boat to see if she was gone. But Smith didn’t budge. They were all pretty full by night time, and they got their guns and started for the boat. They allowed something must be done to vindicate the honor of the town, for if the darkey was permitted to stay, everybody would say they were cowards and afraid of him. So, of course, they had to kill the nigger. Then they made a rush for the river, yelling like Indians, ‘Get out quick, or we’ll burn your boat, and you with it!’

‘‘May be, you think he got scared at this, but he didn’t. He just came out on the bow, and stood there looking and smiling like, but mighty pale, and said: ‘I’m half white and free born; and I’m waiting to see you do it.’ Then they yelled louder than ever, and commenced shooting at the boat, and they soon filled it



SET FIRE TO THE BOAT AND
TURNED HER ADrift —
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BILL SMITH.

full of lead, and Smith, too, for there was over a hundred of them. But Smith, as I said, was game, and fought back and kept them from getting near him with a bowie knife.

‘When they found they couldn’t get him, they set fire to the boat and turned her adrift. He kept shooting from the windows and calling them cowards until the fire got to be so hot he saw he was gone; then he climbed up on top of the boat, with the blaze all around him, and tied a heavy grate-bar to himself, and taking his tin box that he had all his money in under his arm, he said, ‘I’m half white and free born, and I’m here to stay. You may kill me, you white-livered cowards, but you can’t conquer me.’

‘You could hardly see Smith now for the fire, but he never flinched, and the next moment he jumped into the river, and that was the last of him. They fished for his money, but they never found it or him, for they both settled in the mud in the bottom of the river that night, and I reckon they are there yet.



THE FLORID MAN'S STORY



THE FLORID MAN'S STORY

XIV.

"I AM reminded by your remarks," said the florid passenger, addressing the man at the wheel, "of a circumstance which happened to me many years ago, while I was connected with the St. Louis press. If you have no objection I will recount it." The man at the wheel assured the florid passenger that he would be delighted to hear anything he might say, and he continued:

"One day I was sitting in the office of the Bugle, when a man, apparently twenty-eight or thirty years of age approached me and inquired:

" 'Is the river editor in?'

"On being answered affirmatively, he went on:

" 'I'm glad to meet you. How do you do?' extending his hand and shaking my own cordially. 'I have called,' he said, 'to ask of

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

you a little favor. The fact is, I am a journalist, and just arrived here to-day from the East on my way to New Orleans, and as I am out of money, I thought maybe you could get me a pass on one of the boats.'

'I told him that I would see what could be done presently, and requested him to call later on.

' 'But where am I to go to?' he broke in. 'I might as well stay here as anywhere,' and he leaned back in his chair and threw his feet upon the writing-desk, as though determined to quarter himself upon me permanently.

'Observing that he had no intention of retiring until he had been provided for, I hastened down to the boat that was to leave that evening and effected an arrangement with the Captain to take the man to New Orleans. Then I returned to the office and told him of my good fortune, or his own good fortune, rather. To my surprise, he seemed depressed and troubled in spirit. He leaned his head on his hand and appeared to be wrapped in thought. Then he straightened up, and throwing his head back, gazed abstractedly at the ceiling. By and by he said:

THE FLORID MAN'S STORY.

“ ‘And she’s a good boat, is she—a regular packet?’

“ ‘I answered affirmatively.

“ ‘Lives well?’

“ ‘Yes, at the top of the market.

“ ‘Won’t blow up?’

“ ‘Isn’t likely to, I replied.

“ ‘And she goes this evening?’

“ ‘Yes, at five o’clock.

“ ‘How far is it from here to the river?’

“ ‘About half a mile.

“ ‘Muddy?’

“ ‘Yes; there’s some mud on the landing, but if you’re cautious you can keep out of it.

“ ‘No, I can’t,’ he answered despondently; ‘my lungs are affected, and it will set me to coughing. Can’t you send me down in a carriage?’

“ ‘At this juncture my impulse was to kick the man down the stairs; but, reflecting that he would be sure to come back and consume more of my valuable time, I concluded to get rid of him at any cost. So I said:

“ ‘Yes, I can,’ and sending for a hack, I took him to the boat and introduced him to

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the officers. When I started ashore he called me back and said:

“ ‘I wish you’d stand good for me with the bartender for what drinks I may need on the trip.’

“ ‘All right,’ I said, willing to sacrifice the barkeeper, and almost everything else, to get the man off my hands and out of town. ‘Anything more I can do for you?’

“ ‘Well, maybe you’d better leave a ten; I might strike a little game, you know, and it would keep me from getting lonesome.’

“ ‘And you’re sure that’s all?’

“ ‘Yes, for the present!’

“ ‘Then, just take a seat and wait until I send it down, and don’t be impatient.

“ ‘I walked ashore and stood on the landing for a moment, contemplating the situation. Then I said to myself, ‘Let no man speak illy of the Mississippi steamboats. They have their duties to perform toward society; and if that boat will only blow up and kill that miserable creature, she will not have existed in vain.’ Three days later the intelligence came that the boat had exploded her boilers, with great loss of life. I scanned the long list of



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MAY BE YOU'D BETTER LEAVE ME ALONE

THE FLORID MAN'S STORY.

the lost only to meet with disappointment. The traveling journalist's name appeared among the uninjured, and, three months later, after having passed through a siege of yellow fever, cholera and small-pox unscathed, he returned in good health and confronted me. I at once resigned my place and took a solemn oath never to puff another Mississlppi craft. They are all frauds and unreliable, more apt in their freaks to kill a man plowing in a field a mile away, than one placed by Providence directly over the boilers."



ROBBER'S CAVE



ROBBER'S CAVE

. XV.

"ABOUT the closest place I was ever in, I reckon," resumed the man at the wheel, when the florid man had concluded, "was the time we got lost in the robber's cave on the lower Ohio. There were four of us, and we all carried torches. Then we had candles that we lighted when we came to a place that we wanted to get a good look at. Some of the openings were small, and overhead they looked like they were made of icicles that glistened like glass every time the light shone on them. We kept going until we came to a place that was so wide that we couldn't see its sides, although we knew it must be pretty large, for a stream was running through it, and the water made such a noise among the rocks that we couldn't hear one another talk. There was a level walk along the side, and we followed it until it got to be so narrow that the men got

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scared and said we'd better not go any farther, so we turned around and started back. Pretty soon we came to a room that was different entirely from the others that we had been in, for the floor was dry, and there was a hole in the top about as big as a barrel that let in the light. We took our torches and examined the sides to see if it had any openings except the one that we came in at, and we found that it hadn't, and we started to go back, when one of the men noticed a man's hand cut in the rock, with the finger pointing outward, and under it was cut the words: '*This way to the mouth of the cave.*' We knew by this that we had found the robber's main den, for the room was dry and, as I said, lighted from overhead. We were pretty badly scared when we found that we were lost, but we got over it when we saw the hand pointing and the words under it, for we knew there were more of them. So we started on again, and in a few moments we came to a place where there were three passages, and of course we didn't know which one to take, so we stopped and commenced to look for the sign. We kept searching for some time, and it began to look like we were in a bad fix, when I thought the



THIS WAY TO THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE .
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ROBBER'S CAVE.

sign might be higher up, and raising my candle above my head, I soon found it. There was three of them—one at the mouth of each passage, all pointing the same way, and the same words under them. '*This way to the mouth of the cave.*' I looked at my watch and found we had been gone from the boat two hours. Our torches began to show a poor light, and we stopped and trimmed them, and fixed them up so that they would last a few hours longer; and when we were all right we started on once more. Well, we were just about as uneasy a set as you ever saw by this time, and hurried ahead as fast as we could. In about half an hour I heard a noise, and we listened. It was a sort of a roar, and we couldn't make anything out of it, so we started on again. Pretty soon it grew plainer, and we stopped again, when I heard some one shouting, 'Oh, Cap'n!' I knew by this that we were coming out all right, and that somebody was calling me, thinking we had got lost. In about two minutes we were out, and I never was gladder of anything in my life. No, I don't want to go in there again.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“But it was a long time before they found out about the robbers. Every year two or three loaded produce boats would be missing and the crews never heard of afterwards, and it began to look like something was wrong somewhere, though nobody could account for it. They said maybe the boats had got caught in a fog and run down into the sea and was lost there. They knew that somebody was stealing horses and killing people that were coming through there with money, but they had no suspicion who it was, and never would have found out, I reckon, if it hadn't been for one of the men getting away one dark night, when they took a boat, and letting out the secret. After the truth came out, the cave got to have such a bad name that you couldn't get boats to pass it at night at all, and when they went by in day-time, there would always be two or three of them lashed together, so that they could help one another if they got into trouble. That is, all of them did except old Archie Frame. He went right along alone, as if nothing was the matter, and would lay up and wait so as to get to go by in the night, for he said if the law was to be broke, he wanted

ROBBER'S CAVE.

to be there and see it done. Frame was the most curious man you ever saw. As long as everything went on smooth, and nobody was imposed upon, he never bothered himself about anything but his own business, but when anything got out of shape you always heard from him. He wanted peace, and would have it, cost what it might. Whenever the sheriff of the county where he lived had some hard customer to arrest, he always got Frame to go with him. They could dodge the sheriff, or scare him sometimes, but when they saw Frame coming, they knew what to depend upon. The majesty of the law had to be vindicated if it took all the powder and lead in the county to do it. That was the kind of a man old Cap'n Archie Frame was.

“Well, as I said, he wanted everything to go on smooth, and everybody to have their rights, and when he heard that a band of robbers were carrying on their depredations on the free commerce of the country, he felt that it was his duty to stop it. He run by four or five times, thinking they would tackle him, but they didn't, and he got restless and adopted another plan. He picked out a crew of men

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

that had been with him a long time, and knew how to use a gun and bowie knife, and went down to a point about twenty miles above the cave and built a shanty on the bank just like he was going to open a wood-yard or something. After awhile the river rose, and along came a boat, when he hallooed for them to send out a skiff, as he wanted to come aboard. When the skiff landed and Frame and his men got in it, it was pretty well loaded, and the man that brought it was scared almost to death, for he thought he'd got the robbers, but when they came alongside the boat, the Capt. knew Archie, and said:

“ ‘Hello, Archie; what's up?’

“ ‘Oh, nothin,’ says Frame, ‘only we want to go down the river with you a ways, that's all.’

“ ‘All right,’ says the Capt.; ‘make yourselves at home.’

“ ‘This was just before sundown, and the Captain was getting ready to tie up for the night, for he had heard that the cave was a pretty rough place, and he didn't want to go by it only in the day-time. When Frame saw what they were doing he said:

ROBBER'S CAVE.

“ ‘Don’t be afraid, but just keep right on; the river’s a public highway, and if anybody attempts to interfere with it, they’ll have to take the consequences. Just listen to me and you’ll not get into any trouble.’ ”

“ ‘All right,’ said the Captain, for he knew Frame could be depended on.

“ ‘Well, they kept ahead, and just before they came to the cave they heard a skiff start out from the shore and make for the boat.

“ ‘That sounds kind of suspicious,’ said Frame, ‘and we’d better get ready to give them a warm reception, in case it’s any of them cut-throats. Boys,’ he says to his men, ‘you all know what I mean when I talk. Just be alive now.’ ”

“ ‘Aye, aye, sir,’ they answered.

“ ‘Now, you go below,’ says Frame to the boat’s crew, ‘and stay there till I call you.’ ”

“By the time the crew was out of sight, the skiff was alongside, and the men commenced to tumble a lot of rocks on top of the boat, with ropes tied to them, and then they piled aboard themselves. Frame knew now that they were the robbers, and the rocks were to anchor the bodies to the bottom of the river after they’d

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been killed, so that nobody could ever find them. When they'd got the skiff tied up and everything ready, they came down to the steering platform where Frame and his men were, and the leader drew his pistol and said:-

“ ‘Throw up your hands.’ ”

“ ‘All right,’ said Frame. ‘Do you hear, boys? Up with ’em!’ ”

“ ‘When their hands went up their bowie-knives was in them, and before the leader could think, Frame knocked his pistol overboard, and said:

“ ‘Move a finger, and you’re a dead man.’ ”

“ ‘The robbers saw it was no use to show fight, and stood still.

“ ‘Turn your faces the other way,’ said Frame, “ ‘and let’s see how quick you can do it; there, that’ll do. Now, throw your arms overboard, and be alive.’ ”

“ ‘When they had emptied their pockets into the river, Frame said:

“ ‘Now, move up to the bow, there, and sit down—and be quick!’ ”

“ ‘As soon as they had dropped on the deck, he said: ‘I want each of you to tie one of those stones to yourself, and hurry up.’ ”



ALL RIGHT, SAID FRAME;
DO YOU HEAR? UP WITH 'EM.
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ROBBER'S CAVE.

‘“Then he rapped for the Captain and crew of the boat to come on deck, and in about an hour the boat was landed at Smithland, and the robbers were turned over to the Sheriff.

‘“That was the last of them.”’

GROWING CRITICAL

XVI.

THE tall passenger from the East had just made the remark that "it is lucky that the weather is so fine, as it added greatly to the enjoyment of the trip," but the man at the wheel didn't seem to be in his accustomed good humor, and was not quick to respond. At length he observed:

"I don't take much stock in what you call luck. Of course, as long as the world stands folks will be born, and get married, and get divorced, and try to get through a hard, long winter without money, but luck hasn't anything more to do with it than the whooping cough or measels has. Has luck anything to do with the river getting so low that catfish have to hunt the deep holes in the summer? or it's freezing up in the winter, so that the crows skylark on the ice for three months at a time? These things happen every year, and yet,

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

men that ought to know better, go right on, living up to all they make, and then, when they find themselves with nothing to do, and have to go to the soup house for their hash, they call it hard luck. Every summer they're shouting that they never saw the weather so hot or the water so low, and in the winter they never saw it so cold or times so dull, when the fact is, these things happen every year.

"And yet, there are those who hold that the Lord is not merciful. Why, such ignorance and imbecility is enough to make Him send Gabriel with his horn to close the whole thing up in disgust. Now, there's that same gang sitting there on the different levees, with their feet done up in gunnybags; they were there last year, and will be next year, just the same. When business opens they will be earning three dollars a day carrying sacks, and blowing it all in for rot-gut whisky, and go right on, expecting Providence to suspend His laws to allow them to make idiots of themselves. Why, such creatures don't know as much as wild animals or insects. The tumble-bug has got more sense than that, for he puts away his winter supplies; and the bear lays in



NOW THERES THAT SAME GANG SITTING
ON THE LEVEE WITH THEIR FEET DONE UP
IN GUNNY BAGS.

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GROWING CRITICAL.

fat enough to do him through the cold weather, but the American freeman, who claims the right to vote and help run the government, still depends on the soup house! Oh, my! It's enough to make a man want to die to think of it! Such idiots as them are howling for free silver, and want to turn things upside down because they can't get something for nothing! They just feel that they're not worth fifty cents on the dollar, and they don't want anybody else to be.

“Now, just take a look at those levees. You'll find miles of the finest paved wharves that ever lay out of doors, and nothing on them but a few piles of worm-eaten skids. What gets me is, that the duller business gets, the bigger they make the landings. Forty years ago, when everything went by water, and there was business till you couldn't rest, there was no place to do it, and now, when there's nothing to do, they've provided a world of room. No, the railroads have got us, and we might as well give in.”



RAFTSMEN



RAFTSMEN

XVII.

FOR a short time the man at the wheel kept his tongue, but at length, the boat coming upon a huge raft of lumber that was floating in the river, he broke out:

‘That reminds me of old times. The Mississippi used to be full of rafts, but they’re getting pretty scarce now, and so are raftsmen. The present generation has no conception of how things used to be thirty or forty years ago. I remember one circumstance in particular, which happened on the St. Louis levee, that will serve to illustrate the change that has taken place in this respect. You will see that we do things differently now.

‘I was pilot on the boat and had gone aboard rather early in the evening, and the men were busy bringing in the freight ‘on the double quick.’ The mate, who stood on the forecas-
tle, eyeing them like a hawk, kept up a continuous cry of: ‘Come, you niggers, let’s have

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this truck in. Hi, there, Busky, take that Keokuk stuff aft. Slip that bacon into the hold,' he yelled to the two or three others that were coming up the stage pushing a huge cask. 'Hurry up. Don't you see those ladies behind you?' waving his hand as if to clear the way, and a moment later, bowing and motioning them to the stairs that led to the cabin.

" 'Hain't he a stunner?' muttered a country-looking rouster, to his partner.

" 'He is,' answered the other, 'but don't let him hear you say so, or you'll be number twenty-one inside of a minute.'

" 'Twenty-one, what?'

" 'Don't you know?'

" 'Hav'nt the least idea.'

" 'Didn't you ever hear of Bill Middleton?'

" 'Never on earth.'

" 'Oh, you must be from the country. Why, say. He keeps his private graveyard, and just feels like the season's thrown away when he fails to plant a fresh corpse.'

" 'Oh, my, I guess I'll quit,' said another.

" 'No you won't,' was the answer, 'and don't let him know that you even thought of it, or the carpenters would be taking your

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measure for a box inside of five minutes. You just hustle now till the trip is over, and get your money with the rest, if you don't want trouble. He never looks for it, but, oh, my! when it starts—well, things move.'

'By this time some two hundred raftsmen, who were to take passage for Minnesota, began to gather on the levee and make their way on board. Each of them carried more or less baggage. Several of them had swung across their shoulders an extra pair of boots, noticeably elegant in their finish, patent leather tops, quilted and stitched artistically. Among the whole two hundred, however, not more than half a dozen were thus equipped. Two-thirds of these were officers, and climbed the stairs to the cabin.

'“Do you see them fellers with their boots over their shoulders?” said the rouser to his companion.

'“Yes; what of 'em?”

'“Oh, nothin', only they are the fighters. Don't monkey with any of them unless you're lookin' for a record. Them's their fightin' boots.'

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“ ‘Oh, I’m not looking for anything in particular,’ said the other, ‘but I’ll not go through this world with my head down. I’m able to work, and am used to it; and I’ll fight my way as far as I go. I may not go beyond the quarter stretch, but I’ll not turn back.’

“ ‘What’s all that talk there?’ cried Middleton, whose sharp eye nothing escaped. ‘Roll.’

“ ‘Here he turned to give directions to several of the men who were preparing to hoist the stage, the freight and passengers being nearly all aboard. The engines were working, and everything was ready to start as soon as the bills of lading were all signed, and the clerk was working like a beaver to complete the job.

“ ‘At last the Captain called to the man at the line to ‘let go,’ and then motioned to me to ‘back her out,’ when immediately there came a loud report from the engine room, accompanied by a cloud of escaping steam. ‘She’s blowed out the packing from her larboard throttle-valve,’ called up Middleton to the Captain; then, turning to the men he shouted: ‘Launch your stage and get out a line.’ The noise continued, greatly to the terror of many on board, especially the ladies, until the steam

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was all let out of the boiler, when it was learned that the accident would cause several hours delay. When order was at last restored, supper went on, which took up an hour or two, for the table had to be reset several times. Then the cabin was cleared and dancing began; a number of poker tables were also in full blast in the hall, when pretty soon a commotion was heard below.

“ ‘What’s that noise?’ said a large, swarthy-complexioned man seated at one of the card tables. He had broad, stooped shoulders, and coughed incessantly, though he was said to be the best man on the boat. He had a record extending back to the early pinery days, when the men always took the boat on the return trip and turned it, or what was left of it, over to the captain when they got ready to go ashore.

“ ‘Oh, nothing,’ said another, who had come up from the lower deck. ‘It’s only a a greeny down there who’s got himself into trouble, that’s all. But Jack Porter will make short work of him; he’s putting on his boots now, and they’re getting the ring ready on the

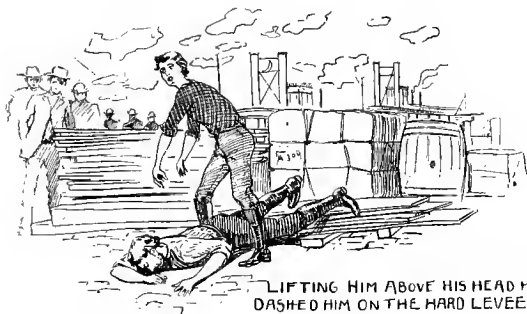
THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

levee. Of course, it'll be square, for Bill Middleton's managing it.'

'Immediately there was a rush for below; the band ceased to play; the dancers abruptly left their partners, and in a moment the cabin was empty. By the time they had reached the shore the ring was formed, and Middleton stood in the middle of it, pistol in hand, calm and apparently as unmoved as a statue. A torch that had been planted near the edge of the ring threw its light on the faces of the crowd, some of them pale from dissipation and others flushed from the same cause. Pistols and knives glittered everywhere, but no one offered to use them.

'“ ‘They’ve had a little dispute,’ said Middleton, as the two contestants came forward and stood facing each other, ‘and I reckon they’d better settle it before we get under way. More room here! The kid hain’t to blame; the man staggered agin him, and he kicked—that was right. So now, if you’re ready, you can go ahead, for the boat’ll soon be leavin.’

“The fighter, stripped to his shirt and pants, and clad in his regulation boots, made a feint as if to knock the other out. They were not



LIFTING HIM ABOVE HIS HEAD HE
DASHED HIM ON THE HARD LEVEE.

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badly matched as to size, though the fighter was the elder and showed marks of dissipation. The rouser was the very opposite, of powerful build, and apparently fresh from the hands of the builder; and somehow, without uttering a word, he seemed to stand as the representative of more than himself or his own cause. In the meanwhile, the fighter continued to feint, as if watching for an opening. But the rouser was not idle; all of a sudden he sprang upon his man with the bound of a tiger, grasped him around the waist, and lifting him above his head, dashed him on the hard levee. The man never stirred. The crowd swayed forward, but Middleton motioned them back. 'Pick him up and take him aboard,' he said quietly to several raftsmen near by; 'I reckon there'll be a pair of fightin' boots for rent.' Then, turning to the rouser, he said: 'Come on, kid; I'll take care of you.' "



SHUM PARISOT



CAPTAIN SHUM PARISOT

XVIII.

"SPEAKING of fighting," said the man at the wheel, sometime later, in response to the florid man's request for another story, "I have been in some fights in my time, rough-and-tumble and otherwise, but the liveliest set-to I ever saw was between Capt. Shum Parisot and an old she bear, up Sunflower River. The old man, as we always called him, was some on the hunt, and as I was a youngster, he used to take me along to carry the game and bottle. Well, one day we were going along as usual in the woods, keeping a sharp lookout for game, when suddenly we came upon three young bears, who, upon seeing us, ran into a hollow log. The old man said he'd been wanting a few young bears for some time, and he guessed that this would be a good chance to get them. So he laid down his gun and crawled in after them, expecting to fetch them out easy enough. But he was mistaken in his

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calculations, for he hadn't been inside the log more than two minutes when the old she bear smelled a rat, and came running at full tilt, knocking me about twenty feet, more or less, and closing in on the old man's rear. As the bear went in she met the old man coming out with her family, and I judge she objected, for you could hear the old man and her cavorting round in that log, and from the noise made it must have been uncommon lively in there. I knew the old man could get away with the old she bear; the man or bear was never made that he'd allow to lick him. Still I was a little uneasy, and wanted the thing over. Pretty soon I heard a noise like a cannon, and the hollow log was gone.

"In the scuffle which, as I said, was quite animated, the old man's powder-horn had taken fire and bursted. When the smoke had cleared away, there was the old man, his hair all gone off his head, and no clothes on him. But the Captain got well, and is living yet.

"It was while I was with Captain Parisot on the Yellowbushy, that a little scene happened that I'll relate. We were racing with another



THAT'S ABOUT WHERE SHE'S RUSTICATING.
SAID THE ENGINEER. PAGE 131

CAPTAIN SHUM PARISOT.

boat when a passenger went below, and said to the engineer:

“ ‘She’s pretty hot, ain’t she?’ ”

“ ‘So, so,’ replied the engineer, as he hung an additional wrench on the safety-valve cord to prevent the steam from escaping.

“ ‘I reckon we’ll overtake that craft soon,’ pursued the passenger.

“ ‘That’s about it,’ returned the engineer, giving the cords another twitch, and hallooing through the trumpet to the firemen to “shove her up.” ”

“ ‘One hundred and ninety-five,’ hummed the passenger, looking first at the gauge and then the boilers.

“ ‘That’s about where she’s rusticating,’ said the engineer.

“ ‘Then the passenger ran his fingers through his hair nervously, and walked about the decks for a few minutes, when he came back to the engineer and said:

“ ‘ ‘Hadn’t you better leave that boat go?’ ”

“ ‘ ‘Can’t do it; must pass her.’ ”

“ ‘ ‘But s’posin’ we should blow up?’ ”

“ ‘ ‘Well,’ said the engineer, as he peeped over the guard to see how fast he was gaining,

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'if it's the will of Providence for this boat to blow up, we'll have to stand it.' Then he hallooed to the fireman to roll up another barrel of bacon, mix plenty of resin with the coal, and give her a little more turpentine and oil.

" 'Can't you stop and let me off?' said the passenger.

" 'Couldn't think of it,' was the reply.

" 'Not for money?' asked the passenger.

" 'No, not for all you're worth; wouldn't stop for the President of the United States till after we've passed that boat.'

" 'Then the danger'll be all over, won't it?'

" 'Yes, I guess so—for a while at least.'

" 'And you think we can pass her without blowing up?'

" 'Hope to.'

" 'Well,' said the passenger, who by this time had begun to take an interest in the race, 'I guess I'll try and stand it.'

" 'A few moments later he was enthusiastically assisting the fireman to pass up the pine knots, and after the race had been won he went back and inquired of the engineer if he didn't think they'd soon overtake another craft, as he rather liked the excitement.' "



LIVING ON WIND



LIVING ON WIND

XIX.

“SOME of them old-timers, I reckon,” broke out the man at the wheel later on, “used to just like to hear themselves talk. Now, there’s that yarn about living a whole summer on wind, that old Orange Blossom Bill used to tell, that never could have happened, and yet, lots of people more than half believed it. They say that Blossom at first, only intended the story as a joke, but he kept on telling it so often that he finally got to think that it was true, himself.

“I have heard that a lie will shape itself up in this way, if you’ll only persist in telling it long enough. Well, this is the way Bill used to spin the yarn out: ‘We’d been loafing in New Orleans about three months, without a boarding house, and we kept getting poorer and poorer, till at last we got to be so thin that the whole sixteen of us wouldn’t make a shadow. Why, there wasn’t flesh enough on us for the fever, which was raging, to take

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

hold of. It had no more effect upon us than if we were lamp-posts. We were about gone up the spout, sure enough, when one day I happened to look up the street, and I saw a man coming running, with a funnel sticking in his mouth. He was the heftiest looking creature I ever laid eyes on, and looked as if he might weigh a ton. When he came to where we were sitting on the curb-stone, he stopped, and taking the funnel from his mouth, said:

“ ‘You ’uns ’ pear to be hard up.’ ”

“I told him, in a whisper, for I was awful weak, that we were.

“ ‘Hungry?’ ”

“We all nodded.

“Then he handed the funnel to the one next to him, and told him to put the small end in his mouth, and light out around the block. One of the boys tried the thing, and in about five minutes came back looking like a balloon ready to go up. You’d have thought he was some fat man escaped from a museum. Talk about clothes! Why, there wasn’t a suit of clothes in all Orleans big enough to fit him.

“Then we all took our turn, and when we got through our own mothers wouldn’t have



HE WAS THE HEFTIEST LOOKING CREATURE I EVER
LAID EYES ON.

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LIVING ON WIND.

known us. Well, we lived on wind for the rest of that summer, and it was a long one, too; you hear me. Talk about your light diets—well, I don't want anything more delicate than wind while I'm outside of Paradise.

“But we got to be mighty uncomfortable towards the last, you bet. One day we were sitting on the landing, watching the sea-gulls flying about over the river, and wondering to ourselves how long it would be till the boats would commence running, when some boys that thought they'd play a joke on us, came up behind us and began sticking pins into us. I saw them in time to get out of the way, but the others got their skins pricked, and immediately commenced to collapse; and in five minutes there wasn't anything left of them but their skins and bones, and you could put the whole of them into a half bushel measure.’

“Another more improbable story was the one about the man whose claim was barred by limitation. He was pilot on a boat that got to racing with another craft, and finding it impossible to stay in the lead, she concluded to blow up and quit business. So she let go her boilers and scattered things over two or three

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

states, as was the fashion those days, and it was supposed that everybody was lost. But finally, one of the pilots turns up and brought suit for his wages. When the case came to trial, the judge ruled for the defense, declaring the claim outlawed. The pilot had been blown so high that he didn't get back to earth for more than ten years.

“Bill used to say, that when one of them old-time boats made up her mind to quit business, she fixed things so that nobody would ever come back to bother the owners.



JERRY WALSH



JERRY WALSH

XX.

FOR a time the man at the wheel was inclined to be less communicative, but at length he dropped again into the old rut, and went on: "One of the worst used up men that was ever on the Mississippi was old Jerry Walsh, the mate who held his last berth on the High Bouncer, with Captain Flannery. Walsh held out for a long time, but at last he had to give in and lay off for repairs. I had known old Jerry for a long time, and was sitting in Doctor Bing's office when he came in. He spoke to me first, and then turning to the Doctor, said:

" 'How d'ye do? I've heer'd o' ye fur a long time, Doctor, an' I know ye're a stunner at yer bisness. I 'low ye kin fix me up ef eny man livin' kin, though I'm in purty bad shape and want a heap done ter me. Ye kin jes' take the contrac' ter do the job, an' sen' out an' buy what you hain't got. I wun't give myse'f away by goin' 'roun' ter too many shops.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

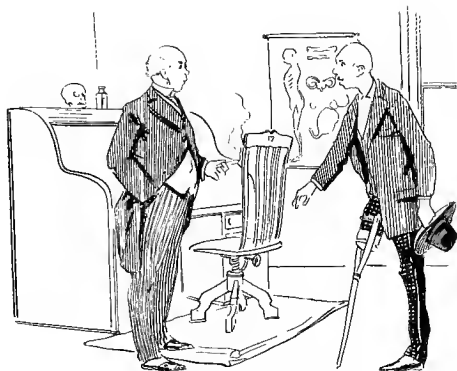
Ye kin ten' ter all o' that. An' now, ef ye're ready, ye kin get out yer probin' iron an' be-gin the inspekshun.'

'What do you think is the matter with you?' inquired the doctor.

'Matter, Doc? W'y, 'bout ev'rything, I reckon. My liver an' kidneys hain't bin 'scapin' out fur a long time, an' I expec' ye'd better look arter them fust. I've made a list here (drawing a slip of paper frcm his pocket) of a few o' the repa'rs I need. Let's see—new teeth, one glass eye, three fingers an' a thumb on one han', one wooden leg, three toes on my foot, (you see I've only one, Doc.), a new pair o' ears, a right han', some new ribs an' a wig. Thar may be suthin' else wanted done ter me, but that's all I kin think on now.'

'You must have seen rough usage,' said the Doctor.

'Rough? Waal, I sh'd say so! W'y I've fit my way through this worl' from the time I war three years ol; an' Doc. when I look back over what I've bin through, I'm s'prised ter see this much of me lef'. But I got my work in, Doc. I've chawed off more ears and noses an' caved in more ribs 'an any man 'at ever



MATTER DOC?

WHY ABOUT EVERYTHING, I RECKON

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JERRY WALSH.

follered the Mississippi, an' them ez knows me knows it. They wun't bounce Jerry Walsh fur a sof' thing ter this day—nary time! Have a smoke?' Here he handed the Doctor a stogy cigar. when he went on—

“‘They’re not very fine, Doc., but they’re what I war raised on, an’ I never go back on my pedigree. Some fo’ks do. They git up in the worl’, w’ar good clos’, an’ live on the cream o’ the lan’ fur awhile, an’ tum’le down agin; but that hain’t me. I’m jes’ now whar I sta’ted on that racket, an’ mean to stay thar. No finery for Jerry. But I’ve got the money ter pay fur what I order, an’ ye kin bet on it. Jes’ put me in good shape an’ make out yer bill, an’ when I git ready ter haul in my lines an’ leave, ye’ll git yer money, an’ don’t you forgit it.’ ”



TIMELY AID



TIMELY AID

XXI.

“MANY are the scenes I have witnessed,” said the man at the wheel, after a brief rest, “and among them I remember an incident that came to my notice some years ago on the St. Louis landing. A middle aged, shabbily dressed man was sitting on a pile of skids with his face buried in his hands as if engaged in deep thought, when presently the Bethel minister approached him and said, ‘my friend, you seem to be in trouble.’

“‘You are exactly right,’ said the other, sadly.

“‘Hard up,’ continued the minister, in sympathetic tones.

“‘No name for it,’ was the answer.

“‘Out of employment I suppose, and have a family depending on you for support?’

“‘You’re wrong there, mister; I’m not married.’

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“ ‘Ah! then I see you have no home to go to.’

“ ‘Not just now, mister, for you see, I’m out of a berth.’

“ ‘And where do you live when at home?’

“ ‘On the boats there.’

“ ‘Haven’t you a boarding house?’

“ ‘No; had one, but got broke and they fired me.’

“ ‘Too bad,’ said the minister; ‘here’s a nickel; go and get yourself something to eat, and come up to the Bethel after awhile and I will see what I can do to relieve your wants until you can get work.’

“ ‘Thank you, mister,’ said the man; ‘this will help me out, but I’m not hungry.’

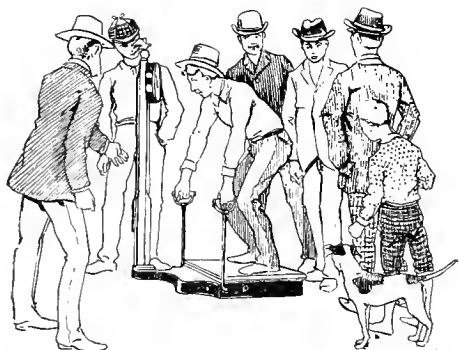
“ ‘Then possibly you are not well,’ said the minister.

“ ‘Never was better in my life,’ he replied.

“ ‘Lost a dear friend, maybe, and as a consequence, your spirits are temporarily depressed.’

“ ‘No, mister, nothing of that kind troubles me.’

“ ‘Then may I ask what it was that weighed so heavily on your spirits when we first met.’



IN A FEW MINUTES HE WAS THE CENTER
OF AN ADMIRING CROWD. PAGE 149

TIMELY AID.

“ ‘Do you see that lifting machine over there?’ inquired the man, with a wishful look.

“ ‘I do,’ answered the minister, ‘but what has that to do with your welfare?’

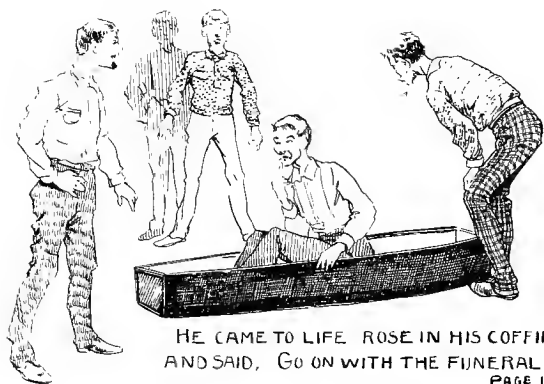
“ ‘Well, you see, parson, the fact is, I’ve been just spoiling all day to see how much I could lift on that machine, but it wont be long now until I’ll find out.’

“ ‘A few minutes later he was the center of an admiring crowd, and doing his level best to break the record.’”



JIM WRIGHT





HE CAME TO LIFE ROSE IN HIS COFFIN,
AND SAID, GO ON WITH THE FUNERAL.

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JIM WRIGHT

XXII.

"SPEAKING about high-toned old-timers," continued the pilot, "there's none of them that could hold a candle to old Jim Wright. He was the highest spirited and the most ambitious deck hand that ever run on the Mississippi. Why, he took more pride in stowing freight and keeping everything about the decks in order than any man that ever followed the business. That's the reputation Jim had, and he never was out of a berth. Everybody knew him, and when a mate shipped on a boat he would always ask, 'What's old Jim Wright doing?' for he knew that if he got Jim he would have nothing to do but send in the freight and Jim would see that it went out at the right place and in good order. And to see him lay for a rouster when he thought that one of them was trying to bore into a whiskey barrel, and jerk him bald-headed when he nabbed him, was a sight to see. Jim seemed

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

to think that when he shipped on a boat that he was accountable for everything that went wrong, and he made it particularly interesting for them that didn't walk the chalk. Just when Jim came on the river nobody knew, but from some rough figures that he made himself as to how long he had been on such and such a boat in such a trade, and such and such a boat in another trade, it must have been a long time, I reckon about two hundred and seventy-five years. And he could talk of old-time boating to beat anybody. Well, as I said, Jim was ambitious, and so he was. He didn't want to be promoted; that wasn't his style. He didn't want to be higher than a deck-hand, but he wanted to be that through and through, for, as he said, honor and fame from no condition rose, or something of that sort, and when he died he wanted the flags lowered to half-mast; that's all he wanted. That was Jim's ambition. Well, one day the old man took sick and apparently passed in his checks. We kept him on board till the next day so as to plant him on a high bluff that didn't overflow, and just as we were going to put the cover on the coffin, he came to

JIM WRIGHT.

life and rose up and asked in a weak kind of a whisper if the flags were at half-mast. Well, we were obliged to say they were not, for we had forgotten to drop them. Jim looked as if he had lost his last friend. His heart was broken, and he said he didn't want to live any longer. We wanted to take him out and nurse him till he got well again, but he wouldn't put up with it. He set for a few moments thinking, and then laid back in his box and told us to go on with the funeral.''



THE DRUMMER'S STORY



THE DRUMMER'S STORY

XXIII.

“YOUR remarks about the river,” observed the drummer, speaking to the man at the wheel, reminds me of an experience I had the time of the great flood at Cincinnati a few years ago,” and without further ado he went on to relate:—

“With my accustomed facility of always being in the wrong place at the right time, I had slipped into the city on the last train that communicated with the outer world, and after registering at the hotel, learned that I was in town to remain some days. The water in the Ohio exceeded all other freshets and was still rising. The town was full of the wildest rumors concerning the inundation. When I retired for the night the landlord, who was a friend of mine, and desired to provide against the contingency of funeral expenses, said it would be best to go well up, and turning to the clerk inquired, ‘Who’s in seventy?’

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“ ‘It’s empty,’ was the reply. ‘Then give it to him.’ ” Seventy was on the second floor, and the hotel was a three-story building. The rain, which seemed to have money up on beating Noah’s, and all subsequent floods, was making limited time on a clear track and had everything its own way. As the bell-boy closed the door and uttered his mournful good-night, I placed a candle in the window—there was no gas in the city,—so that should any stray gondoliers be prowling about the ‘Venice of America’ during the nocturnal hours they might see that this particular portion of the palace was occupied and, if need be, come to the rescue. I then turned in. How long I slept I had no means of knowing, for when I awoke the light had burned out and all was as dark as the future of an option dealer caught on the wrong side of the market and ‘squoze’ dry. It occurred to me, however, that the bed appeared to move gently and peacefully about the room, and when I turned over I noticed a plashing sound. I was confused and lay meditating for a moment, when I concluded I’d better get up, and, giving a leap to the floor, I struck waist-deep in the water. I

THE DRUMMER'S STORY.

felt in vain for my clothes, which, together with the chair on which they were placed on my retiring, had floated away to some other part of the room. Then I made a plunge for the window for the purpose of climbing to the top of the house, but to my horror, I discovered that all means of escape was downwards. Here I again found myself confronted by my usual luck. Had I been aroused by fire those ladders would have led directly to the roof, where I could have perished heroically in the flames, and the next morning have the event published in all the leading dailies of the country. But as it was a great flood that was unhousing everybody, as a natural consequence, all means of escape led to the bottom of it—to the basement, as it were. I leaned out of the window and shouted, 'Boat ahoy!' but there was no response, and I was becoming desperate, when I heard some one in the house, in a loud and jocular voice, say, 'Yes, I've lost everything, but I'm not going to complain. It's the only way to get rid of them.' I waded to the door, opened it and looked out into the flooded passageway, where I saw an old man in the act of ascending a pair of narrow stairs.

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

I called to him, whereupon he turned and beckoned me to follow, which I did without loss of time. On reaching the top of the house we found a number of persons already there, some of them very much alarmed for their personal safety, as it was evident the water would soon be upon them. My aged friend, however, was in excellent spirits, and rubbed his hands as though enjoying the situation immensely. He said it was the supreme moment of his life, and he could now die happy, 'Ha-ha-ha!'

"'Why, I thought you lost everything?'" I said.

"'And I did,' he answered, with a laugh that indicated the liveliest satisfaction; 'and so I did, but I don't complain. It's been pretty expensive, but the compensation will be of inestimable value to the whole valley. It will kill them all off.'

"'Kill who off?'" I asked.

"'Those old high-water liars! They can't stand around now and tell innocent, unsuspecting people what they saw in '32 and '47. Their occupation's gone, for this is the boss flood, and we're here to see it!'" "



THE SUPREME MOMENT OF HIS LIFE.

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**THE FLEET THAT TARRIED AT
SHAWNEE**



THE FLEET THAT TARRIED at SHAWNEE

XXIV.

“AND it came to pass, once upon a time, that many vessels freighted with rich wares and precious ointments, sailed down the Ohio. Now, the tide being out, the water was exceeding low, and when the first vessel came into the place, called ‘Shawnee,’ she tarried, that the pilot might go in his small boat and take soundings, for the master was a wise man and pious, and thought it best to be cautious. And the pilot went forth and labored into the day, and was much perplexed, and cried out, ‘Lo, I find but five feet by the stick, and our vessel is drawing seven.’ And when the pilot had carried the tidings to the master he waxed wroth, and strode about like one much angered; and he took from his pocket a great roll of the weed called to-bac-co, which he put into his mouth and chewed; and when he chewed he spat on the decks, and the things thereon were wet with the spittle. And he

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

turned unto the mate and said, 'Unloose the cord that binds the vessel to the land;' and unto the pilot he said, 'Put her into it;' and unto the engineer he said, 'Give her steam.'

'And it came to pass, that the vessel went forward for a season, when she stood still in the middle of the stream, and would go no farther. And the master, seeing that the vessel was stranded, said unto the mate, 'Throw overboard a spar,' and he did it. And they sparred a day and a night, and the vessel stirred not. And the master called together the passengers, and said unto them, 'You see for yourselves how it is. Doth not the Government manage badly?' And they answered, 'Yea, it studyeth not the interest of commerce.' And the master was much pleased with their answer, and he turned his eyes towards the East, which was in the direction of the place called the 'drug store,' and he journeyed in that direction. And they that stood round about felt that it was good for them to be there, and they followed him. And they tarried at the drug store for a season, and made much merry. And it came to pass, that many other vessels wanted to go forward, but the passage



AND THEY TARRIED AT THE DRUG STORE
FOR A SEASON AND MADE MUCH MERRY.

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THE FLEET THAT TARRIED AT SHAWNEE.

was blocked and they could not. Then the masters of the other vessels gathered together and held council. And they said, 'Surely, this man is no sailor, for he putteth his vessel on the bar when the water is not sufficient.' And when it came to the ear of the master whose vessel was stranded that they talked this wise of him, he was much wroth, and said unto them, 'Have I not known these waters many summers, yea, even before you were born, and yet you say these things of me.' And he swore after the fashion of the pioneer fathers, and his voice was heard in the land. Then the masters of the other vessels put on their armor, and they swore much, until the country people marveled, for their eloquence was great. And yet the water rose not, neither did the vessel come off the bar. Now be it known, that all this came to pass under a republican form of government and while Congress was in session, which goeth to show that the railroad monopolies have bribed legislation and are bent on the destruction of the water-courses. And it came to pass, that upon the third day that the masters had exhausted their wrath, they assembled and dwelt together in

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

unity as a band of brothers. And they said: 'Let us send for barges and take away some of the cargo from the stranded vessel, for it is plain that the Lord is against us, and will not suffer us to proceed until we have made a sacrifice.' And when they had lighted the vessel she floated, and all went on their way, and peace returned to 'Shawnee.'

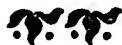
'And when the masters had reached their journey's end, they met in council, after the fashion of the times, and there was much conversation. And one who was a wise man and given to meditation, rose up and said: 'Brethren, have we not builded our vessels too large for the waters that they navigate?' and they all marveled and answered, 'Yea, he but speaketh truly, that's what's the matter with Hannah.' Then the masters were silent for a season, and gazed they upon one another as if perplexed. And one master, who had not spoken at all, girded up his loins and said: 'Is it just that we show all this enterprise, while the Lord and Congress stand still and cause the waters not to increase?' And they all answered: 'Verily, it is not according to Hoyle.' Then they drew up a paper, and each master

THE FLEET THAT TARRIED AT SHAWNEE.

signed thereto his name, and it read this wise :
'Resolved, That what the Nation most needs
is large rivers.' And they immediately departed to the house of a publican and imbibed much Kentucky whiskey, a beverage of high repute in the land."



THE COAST WHARFBOAT



THE COAST WHARFBOAT

XXV.

"FROM the way things look," said the wharfboat, in a confidential tone, to the steamer which had just come alongside in a dense fog, "you'll not get away till after daylight, and as the town clock just sounded one, you'd better try and make yourself comfortable. I feel like I'd like to have company, anyhow, for the nights are long and lonesome."

"That was a boat signaling," put in the steamer, as an evidence of its own alertness to all that was transpiring on the river, for it behooved them both to be watchful; "but you're not far off as to the time."

"Maybe you're right," said the wharfboat, as the two touched, causing a slight jar which aroused her watchman, who had fallen into a doze near the middle gangway, "for my hearing is not as good as it once was. But which way?"

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

“Oh, I’m bound up, with a whole belly full of sugar, guards dragging, and stiff as a stone fence; no speed; will be six-and-a-half days out, the superintendent will be kicking, but I can’t help it; lose eight hours here, at least.”

“Where to?” demanded the wharfboat.

“You ought to know,” rejoined the steamer; “hasn’t our company been doing business with you for twenty years?”

“Yes; but that ain’t *fifty-two*, by a long shot,” said the wharfoat, somewhat ruffled.

“Don’t come rubbing against me with a record like that. Why, you ain’t in it, at all! Now, *listen*: Old Tom Leathers landed ’long-side of me with his two-boiler ‘Natchez’ in ’48, and he knew me long before that; he ought to—I’ve passed him often enough.”

“Oh, my!” responded the steamer, with amazement; “I must have struck blood here, sure enough; who’d have thought it?”

“No, I’m not much blood now,” returned the wharfboat, gruffly; “but I was somebody in my day. Why, I’ve laid here at the bank and watched my engine wear out three better boats than you; but that’s all right—my timbers couldn’t stand the pressure, besides, you

THE COAST WHARFBOAT.

will see by my lines that I was designed for speed, and they wanted carriers."

"Built by the Howards?" threw in the steamer, tentatively.

"No; long before their time," replied the wharfboat; "but I notice they've turned out some good ones, but nothing that could ever make *me* drink stern water."

"Well," broke in the steamer, "you must have been a daisy! What was your name?"

"Never you mind my name," replied the wharfboat; "you have heard it often enough. If I find you trustworthy, maybe I'll let you into the secret later. Meanwhile, tell your engineer to pull them fires and stop that steam blowing off; the noise shakes my nerves!" They waited until everything was quiet, when the wharfboat went on: "I suppose my time is pretty near out. I am, as you see, all bogged up, and taking water about as fast as a man can pump it out; and it won't pay 'em to keep me much longer. Some of these days I'll be towed down to New Orleans and sold to the Dagoes as a wreck. That'll be the end of me. They'll not care to know my history. That would be of no consequence to them, but per-

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

haps it might be to you; and as we are destined to spend the night together, I don't mind talking to you a little. I remember you have always treated me right; put out your rope fenders and come in easy, showing you have a little respect for an old skeleton like myself, which is more than many others do. Some of these Western tubs break me all up!"

The steamer signified its desire to listen, and after peering into the fog to assure itself that no other craft was within earshot, the wharfboat proceeded:

"As I said before, I've been here in this dismantled condition, and serving as a wharfboat, for fifty-two years, with the exception of a few weeks at long intervals, when they would take me to New Orleans to be docked, and I have known every boat on the river, that came this low down, since 1840."

"Why, that's fifty-seven years!" put in the steamer, evidently intending to call the wharfboat's attention to a discrepancy of five years in its calculation.

"Yes, that's it," rejoined the wharfboat, gravely. "Fifty-seven years, wharfboat and steamboat. How time flies! You can see that

THE COAST WHARFBOAT.

I am old fashioned. Notice how low my cabin sits; couldn't stow five tiers of cotton between my decks. They used to build us that way so that we'd not catch the wind, and make better time. Your wide guards and sky-scrapers came later. The tributary boats started the fashion. I remember the old 'Anne's Crocker' that ran up Red River to Lake Caddo, was one of the first. She used also to do the bayous, and went down the 'Loggy' to Minden. Square stern, narrow wheels, but two good pocket-valve engines. You could her 'scape at night a mile off; but she was a cotton carrier—used to pass down with the bales piled so high that you could see nothing but the tops of her chimneys.'"

"How did the pilot see to steer?" broke in the steamer. "Come, now, be consistent."

"That was his business," replied the wharfboat. "They used to do things different those days from what they do now. Besides that, she never landed here, and it wasn't my business to find out. Sometimes, on her up-trips, she'd stop, and when she'd come up against me, it wouldn't break an egg. There were pilots on the river those days. The 'Crocker'

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

was Southern through and through, owned her own niggers and fed on the best; but she was plain and didn't put on any style.''

"Why should she?" threw in the steamer. "We don't, and our president is worth three millions.'"

"But some of 'em did," replied the wharfboat. "Now, there was the 'S. W. Downs,' that used to run in the Ouachita trade—she wouldn't carry over six hundred bales, and put on more airs than anything that touched the wharf. She'd tap her cow-bell for meals and when she wanted her flag lowered, and swell up till I used to think she'd crack all her paint off. And proud! she even refused one night to go out ahead of me because she didn't want to be passed under way. Why, I could have taken her aft of my 'bits' and carried her to the mouth of Red River, where she turned into the timber, in half the time it took her to paddle her way there.'"

"You must have been a stunner," ventured the steamer.

"Oh, I led the gang in my day," rejoined the wharfboat, "and don't you forget it; and there was enough of 'em, too. Bayou Sara

THE COAST WHARFBOAT.

people never got any breakfast on me, and Red River passengers were lucky if they got their coffee swallowed before I was out and gone. Natchez knew when to look for me, and so did Vicksburg, Memphis, Cairo and St. Louis—and there wasn't any telegraph, either. They all knew my days and my hours, and had money to bet I'd be there. I set the pegs for all of 'em, and my time still stands.''

'I thought the 'Robert E. Lee' had made the best time," put in the steamer, with a degree of promptness that indicated her to be anxious to set straight a matter of history.

Here the wharfboat gave a shriek, and began swaying shoreward, as if it was about to climb the bank; then, catching its breath, it cried out:

'Don't talk talk to me of the 'Robert E. Lee' or her time. I knew her by the back. She was too much for the 'Natchez,' but she never beat my time, all things considered. With forty miles less distance to run owing to the cut-offs, and tenders at every point to supply her with pine knots and Pittsburg coal, and then she only got inside of me four hours. Why, I had to take my fuel off the banks, and

THE MAN AT THE WHEEL.

cotton wood at that, and no one to do me a turn. It makes me wild when I hear them talk of beating *my* time. It wasn't done on the square, and the old-timers all know it. She had ten inches more diameter of cylinder than I had, with same stroke, ten feet, but nearly twice my beam; what's yours?"

"Forty-five feet," returned the steamer, with some show of embarrassment at her evident lack of symmetrical proportion.

"Mine's twenty-eight," pursued the wharf-boat, proudly. "A truck of chain would keep me in trim any time, and they always had to have a man or two ready to shift it, especially if there were people aboard that were running from one side to the other. I careened easily, but was built that way, and was expected to. But everything is changed now. No models now. Why, my own engines were put into tubs that always seemed ashamed of themselves; they used to lie alongside of me all night without showing any disposition to speak and I reckon they were glad when they found themselves dumped into the junk-yard. You can't change a boat's principles, and when she has been built for speed and passengers,

THE COAST WHARFBOAT.

she is always sulky when you try to make her a drudge. But how near daylight is it?"

"Struck four last," said the steamer, "and the sky is getting a little lighter. It's time they were astir below with my fires, for steam's down to twenty pounds, if it's anything at all. But I'll be here for some time yet; it will be eight o'clock before this fog's gone. I'm going to lay still until I see my way clear, for there are two or three bayou boats out there that will soon be prowling around, and my owners don't want me to take chances. My captain's pretty conservative, too, in that respect."

"Who is he?" questioned the wharfboat, eagerly.

"Jim O'Neal," returned the steamer, with evident pride; "he's an old-timer, and maybe you've heard of him."

"Yes," answered the wharfboat, dreamily, as if ransacking its memory for early dates; "yes, I recall him as an old pilot. He wanted to steer me back in the 'forties,' but Converse wouldn't have it. He said he couldn't trust me with a boy. But ain't you getting tired?"

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“No,” replied the steamer; “I’m young, and can stand a good deal. Go on; tell me something of those old-time Louisville and Cincinnati packets. You knew the first ‘Sultana.’ I’ve heard my crew talk about her ever since I can remember.”

“Only as a wharfboat, as I am now. But the second, which was the great one, was a contemporary of mine. We never had a brush, because she would never leave port with me, and, if advertised for my night, would always lay over. She had a big name and didn’t want to lose it. You can draw your own conclusions.”

“And the ‘Duke of Orleans,’ that still has the fastest time to Cincinnati; how about her?”

“Good short boat, one hundred and eighty feet long, built to go through the Louisville canal. She was the best boat of her class, and as game as they made ’em, but she always kept a day between herself and me. I’m not boasting. If you knew half the truth, you’d feel like blowing up your boilers because you did not come into the world earlier, when a steamboat amounted to something. O, but I’ve had a history! Lords and ladies, gover-

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nors, senators and planters without number, have traveled on me. Every room in my old cabin has, on different occasions, contained its bride and groom, and General Jackson and the madam made a trip with me. She used to always smoke a pipe, but I liked her and was careful not to hit anything, though I was on big time and the banks were lined with people cheering. Seven and eight, there in the hall, held Clay and Webster on two different trips."

A bell sounded in the distance and was answered by a whistle.

"Those coastboats are beginning to stir," pursued the wharfboat, "'and you'll soon be off."

"You couldn't cut the fog with a knife yet," returned the steamer; "'those fellows steer by the compass. Give them their bearings and they're good for an hour's run before taking a new start. We up-river boats cannot do it; but what's that?"

A moaning sound came from the river below. Only a few notes were sounded when they ceased. They might have emanated from a lion who had just awakened in his jungle, or

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an elephant in captivity giving vent to his pent-up feelings.

“That was an alligator crying for daylight,” answered the wharfboat. “They get tired of the night and long for the sun. Even an old wharfboat will do as much. They sometimes at night creep aboard on my gangways, as if looking for somebody to talk to, but the spirits won’t have ’em and scare ’em to shore again.”

“Spirits!” echoed the steamer, plucking up; “what spirits?”

“Oh, we’re full them,” returned the wharfboat, without the least emotion. “I hear ’em thumping about my decks all night, but I’m used to it. In fact, rather like it. They help to break the monotony. Don’t you have any?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” returned the steamer, a little nervous.

“Well, you’re young,” pursued the wharfboat, reflectively, and, besides, maybe, you don’t have any in your country. Everything goes away from you; everything comes down to us; floating, floating southward to the great ocean, and you know we are on the edge of it. You miss some one, and in one, two or three

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weeks later, maybe in the middle of the night, or it may be in the daytime, I see them passing to the final goal—the gulf beyond.”

Here the steamer drew back with a shudder, as if anxious to be off, but, without seeming to notice its action, the wharfboat went on:

“I’ve had as high as eighty dead people on my deck at one time, taken from a boat that blew up here, and done my share in planting others along the shore during the yellow fever season. And some summers the yellow flag seemed to almost wave from every tree. The banks of the Mississippi are lined with dead, and the sands beneath have their secret. Oh, we see a great deal here in the South that doesn’t bother ’em up there in your section. But I’m getting awful tired of it. I’ve seen too much, and want to go. How my timbers ache and long for the shining river that flowed at the feet of God when the morning stars sang in glory, and will flow on forever! I shall soon be there in all my youth and vigor, and humbly enough will I take my place beside the tiniest dinky that ever struggled with pop-gun engines to make headway against a relentless current, while I, in my arrogance, swept by

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in majestic form and laughed to see my great waves swamp her. Oh, I was as tyrannical as the rest of them."

Here a small bell sounded below, and the steamer, rousing, remarked regretfully:

"That's for the men to fire up; we'll soon be off; the fog is lifting."

The sun was already above the horizon, and the birds were singing in the magnolia groves beyond. The dew glistened on everything, but soon taking wings drifted away with the fog, leaving the perfect Louisiana morning. Then the great bell of the steamer sounded three taps, and a voice from the upper deck cried out, "Let go your lines."

"We are about to part," whispered the steamer, "and I have not yet learned your name."

The wharfboat hesitated for a moment, and then said sadly, and certainly not in a boastful manner, "They called me in my day 'J. M. White,'* and many still living believe that I was the greatest of my race."

As the steamer moved sluggishly westward, another boat bound south came in, and making fast to the old wharfboat, the two were

* The most famous boat on the river.

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soon on their way to New Orleans, where the wreckers were in waiting.

As they rounded out, a wierd voice chanted from the deck of the old hulk:

Oh, the days shall come, in the æons to be,
When the dreamer shall cease to dream,
And the river shall be, as one with the sea,
For there'll be neither ocean or stream.

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